

'WOLVES BY JAMRACH': THE ELUSIVE UNDERCURRENTS IN
SAKI'S SHORT STORIES

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by

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CONTENTS

	Acknowledgements	iv
	Summary	v
	Note on Text	vi
1	Introduction	1
2	"Inexorable Child-Logic"	4
3	"The Domain of Miracle"	63
4	"The Realms of Fiction"	119
5	"Elaborate Futilities"	169
6	Conclusion	228
	Abbreviations	231
	Appendix A: Table of Frequency of Key Words	235
	Appendix B: "The East Wing"	239
	Select Bibliography	246
	Index	253

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SUMMARY

The aim of this study is to examine in depth the means by which Saki exposes the weaknesses and vices of Edwardian society. By concentrating on his short stories, in which his surest and most consistent voice is to be heard, it has been possible to isolate certain elements which facilitate close analysis.

There are certain human failings to which Saki constantly draws attention. For the purpose of questioning what underlies the glittering surface of society four "voices" have been identified.

The first is the voice of the child, pitting himself with "inexorable Child-Logic" against the rigid and unimaginative adult mind and revealing a superiority which is designed to surprise.

In "The Domain of Miracle", it is the supernatural element which fulfills this function, the unsuspecting human being shocked out of complacency by undreamed-of realities.

"The Realms of Fiction" comprises the liars and tricksters who use their verbal skills and powers of imagination to reveal the truths about their victims, and the practical jokers who devise elaborate pranks for the same purpose.

The title of the fourth chapter, "Elaborate Futilities", is an attempt to encapsulate the essence of the society which Saki satirises, with its meaningless rituals and unquestioning platitudes.

Throughout all the stories the voice of the jungle is clearly to be heard.

This dissertation has attempted to explain some of the topical, historical, mythological and religious allusions which pepper Saki's pages and add to his indefinable spice. Certain key words which recur with what seems to be significant frequency are tabled in Appendix A. Appendix B contains the text of "The East Wing", a story which has not previously appeared in a collected edition.

NOTE ON TEXT

Unless otherwise specified all page numbers refer to H.H. Munro, *The Penguin Complete Saki* (London: Penguin, 1982). References prefixed by "L" refer to A.J. Langguth, *Saki: A Life of Hector Hugh Munro. With Six Short Stories Never Previously Collected* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981).

In the course of research one or two other items of interest have come to light: a satirical sketch in the *Westminster Gazette* (July 22, 1902, pp.1-2), entitled "The Woman Who Never Should"; and a story in *Methuen's Annual* (London: Methuen, 1914) called "The East Wing" and subtitled "A Tragedy in the Manner of the Discursive Dramatists". There appears to have been no previous discussion of the latter. All page numbers prefixed by "M" refer to this story, the text of which is to be found in Appendix B.

The title of this dissertation: "Wolves by Jamrach: the Elusive Undercurrents..." is an amalgam of quotations from "Reginald's Drama": "'Wolves in the first act, by Jamrach'" (p. 28) and "'the wolves would be a sort of elusive undercurrent'" (p.30). Each of the chapter headings is also a quotation from the short stories: "Inexorable Child-Logic" from "The Penance", p.426; "The Domain of Miracle" from "Tobermory", p.109; "The Realms of Fiction" from "The Romancers", p.280; and "Elaborate Futilities" from "Cousin Teresa", p.307.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Many studies of Saki (Hector Hugh Munro) to date have concentrated on the development of technique and treatment in his short stories, linked to the scant details of his life and depending often on an imperfect chronology. This dissertation aims to build on the foundations of previous studies but by closer textual analysis places greater emphasis on the deeper meanings and the methods by which Saki arrests his reader's attention.

While he wrote considerably more than the short stories, much of his earlier work, for instance his history: *The Rise of the Russian Empire*; his political sketches collected in "The Westminster Alice" (pp.817-39) and the *Not So Stories*¹ which appeared intermittently in the Westminster Gazette (1902); and his plays (pp.845-944), may be seen as Saki searching for his true voice. His two novels, *The Unbearable Bassington* (pp.569-687) and *When William Came* (pp.691-814) share many of the characteristics of the short stories but in lesser concentration.

It is generally accepted that Saki's technique as a satirist is to reveal human follies or vices by means of an inversion of the natural order of things. Sometimes he does this by use of the supernatural, sometimes animals are superior in wisdom to people, and often children triumph in an adult world. His attack on the conventional society of the day has long been established as the purpose of his satire and the uses of indirection and inversion both provide the strength of his writing and at the same time give rise to misunderstandings. By concentrating on these elements of his work, "the elusive undercurrents" (p.30),² it is hoped to establish both the consistency of his approach and the rich variety within his self-imposed limitations.

Some stories will always be difficult to assign to any one group and for this reason it is useful to see how other critics have tackled the problem. Elizabeth Drew, for instance, states that Saki has "but three strains in his nature: the high spirits and malicious impudence of a precocious child; the cynical wit of the light social satirist; and the Gaelic fantasy of the Highlander",³ all of which is true but too general. Don Henry Otto divides them into "sketches", "stories without heroes" and "characteristic plots"⁴ and while this is very useful as an analysis of form and technique, it is unsatisfactory in giving any clues as to the more nebulous qualities that give his stories their own distinctive flavour. John Letts in his attempt to categorise the stories sums up the difficulties in saying, "the various strains weave in and out of each other in many different stories: but certain elements remain, which seem to be a standard part of the method".⁵

In an attempt to isolate the patterns in this shifting kaleidoscope, the stories have been divided into the main "voices" which seem to proclaim the truth. Chapter One, entitled "Inexorable Child-Logic", is the child's voice, where the adults are brought to see the error of their ways by the clear-sighted vision of the child, three stories being explored in depth. In "The Domain of Miracle", the supernatural voice is discussed, nine of the stories being examined in some detail and the remainder more generally. The third chapter, "The Realms of Fiction" is divided into two sections: (1) lies with a purpose and (2) practical jokes, the point of all of these stories being to disconcert the complacent or arrogant. The babbling voices of Chapter Four, "Elaborate Futilities", are a kind of "white noise" in which the idiocies, ineptitudes and false values of a superficial society are exposed.

Throughout the stories certain recurrent words and motifs seem to draw attention to deceptive appearances and invite closer

examination of Saki's purpose in their constant reiteration, and this is dealt with in Appendix A. Surprises abound, in choice of word and in twist of plot, in figure of speech and in the variety of allusion - topical, historical, Biblical and mythological; and everywhere, in country house, fashionable restaurant or remote farm, is the voice of the jungle.

Notes

1 A parody of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* which appeared earlier in 1902. There were five in all, bearing such titles as, for instance, "The Dalmeny Cat that Walked by Itself" (31 October, 1902), p.3.

2 "Reginald's Drama". All page numbers refer to *The Penguin Complete Saki* (London: Penguin, 1982), unless otherwise specified.

3 "Saki", *Atlantic Monthly*, 164 (July 1940), 97.

4 'Development of Method and Meaning in the Fiction of Saki' (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of S. California, 1969), pp.25 - 131.

5 "Introduction", *Saki : Short Stories* (London: Folio Society, 1976), p.11.

Chapter 2

"INEXORABLE CHILD-LOGIC"

Of his many distinctive voices it could be argued that the stories told from the child's standpoint are most uniquely Saki's. They are, to use Robert Drake's words, "direct, forthright and untainted by the touch of civilization and adulthood".¹ Yet if we remove Vera Durmot and the thirteen-year-old Matilda of "The Boar-Pig" as belonging more to the juvenile delinquent class of whom Reginald and Clovis are the grand masters, and with whom they share a certain sophistication, there are remarkably few. In these stories, the theme seems to be that adults are dull and lack insight whereas children have imagination and can see beneath the conventional, social facade to what is really significant. The hypocrisy is laid bare but what underlies it is folly rather than viciousness. The children also have a tenacity of purpose which is lacking in the adults who change tack when faced with difficulties.

Among them, "The Lumber-Room" and "Sredni Vashtar" are the most celebrated and it is proposed to subject each to close analysis for that reason. "The Penance", while featuring in only a few of the selected editions, is worthy of note also, if only because it affords yet another view of the child versus adult struggle. In this case, the central character is not a child at all but a foolish adult who is brought to see his folly by the "inexorable child-logic" of the children whom he has wronged; whereas in "The Lumber-Room", the child is more than a match for the oppressive adult from the start, and in "Sredni Vashtar" the Manichaean struggle between child and adult is more finely balanced.

Of the rest, the denouement of "Hyacinth" closely parallels the plot of "The Penance" with its uncompromising child protagonist holding children to ransom in a pigsty but is quite different

in tone and content. In "Hyacinth" the setting is a by-election in a marginal seat where Hyacinth's father is standing against the father of the three little Jutterly children whom Hyacinth imprisons in a pig-sty until Jutterly loses the election. It is a political satire on "'the new fashion of introducing the candidate's children into an election contest'" (p.518) and on politicians in general. A warning note is sounded early on by Mrs Panstreppon, Hyacinth's aunt, when, having alluded to an earlier incident of mischief, she replies to his defensive mother, "'Children with Hyacinth's temperament don't know better as they grow older; they merely know more'" (p.519). Mrs Panstreppon is one of the very few adults - the bachelor in the "Story-Teller" is another - who understand the workings of the child mind but, as so often, Hyacinth's besotted mother does not 'listen' to the advice given her.

"Morlvera", an unusual story in that it features working-class children, "The Toys of Peace", where imagination triumphs over the short-sighted middle-class values, and "The Story-Teller", a brilliant tale where an adult with a proper insight into child psychology gives an object lesson to a typically dull, conventional aunt, make up the rest of this group. Common to all these stories is the clear-sighted vision of the child in contrast to the clouded adult viewpoint - the gloss of conventional appearances distorting the adult's perceptions and values. Children do appear in other stories too, of course, notably in "The Strategist", where the contest is between the less than innocent children, with the hostess hovering unsuspectingly in the background; and in "The Easter Egg" where the child is merely part of the vehicle of destruction, having no distinct personality and therefore not forming part of this group.

"Morlvera" is set outside "The Olympic Toy Emporium" but "one would never have dreamed of according it the familiar and yet pulse-quickenning name of toyshop" (p.491) because it is a

toyshop conceived by adults who have obviously forgotten what it is like to be children. Perhaps it is full of toys such as those described in "The Toys of Peace" as represented in "the Children's Welfare Exhibition [...] at Olympia" (p.393). The Morlvera of the title is an "elegantly dressed" doll in the shop window, described through the children's eyes as "cold, hostile, inquisitorial" and "sinister" (p.491). The action of the story viewed by and discussed in the voices of the cockney children, Emmeline and Bert, revolves round the buying of Morlvera by Victor and his imperious mother, a grand lady, who is blind to everything but keeping up appearances. "'Now, Victor, you are to [...] buy a nice doll for your cousin Bertha'", she says (p.493) (her choice of "a nice doll" ironically falling on the "sinister" Morlvera) to which Victor retorts, "'Bertha is a fat little fool.'" The exchange continues in this vein, Victor maintaining his position (in much the same way as Nicholas in "The Lumber-Room" in his dealings with the aunt), while the purchase is made.

Emmeline and Bert meanwhile, on the outside looking in, weave a fantasy round the doll in the window, while watching the drama unfold. When the doll is bought Victor's obtuse mother thinks, "Victor had not been half as troublesome as she had anticipated" (p.494), which echoes the unsuspecting adults in, for instance, "The Lumber-Room", "The Penance" and many more who see only what they want to see. Emmeline and Bert witness "a look of sinister triumph" in Morlvera's "hard, inquisitorial face" (p.494) - she is clearly equated with the adults in their eyes - while "as for Victor, a certain scornful serenity had replaced the earlier scowls; he had evidently accepted defeat with a contemptuous good grace" (p.494). The word "evidently" appears in many of these stories with ironic effect. As always it is dangerous to judge by appearances for, as the grand lady's carriage with Victor aboard reverses before turning and driving off, Victor "very stealthily, very gently, very

mercilessly [...] sent Morlvera flying over his shoulder" (p.494) and under the carriage wheels.

The adults in "The Toys of Peace" are similarly out of touch with the workings of a child's mind. In this story, a satire on the 'heredity versus environment'² theory of child-rearing, and inspired by an article in a London paper of the time, Eleanor Bope exhorts her weak brother Harvey to bring "peace toys" (p.393) as an Easter present for her boys instead of the soldiers which they would certainly have preferred. Harvey is unsure of the wisdom of this idea but allows himself to be persuaded by his domineering sister. When the presents are unpacked from "a large, promising-looking red cardboard box under the expectant eyes" (p.394) of the children, appearances again deceive for instead of a fort they unpack "a municipal dust-bin" (p.395), the ridiculous nature of the "civilian" toys underlining the absurdity of the idea, doomed to failure from the first. Their bewilderment is clear in the questions they ask of their uncle: "'What does he do?'" (p.395). "'Are we to play with these civilian figures?'" (p.396). The children triumph, however, for as boys will be bloodthirsty boys, "Robert Raikes, the founder of Sunday Schools" (p.395) becomes "Louis the Fourteenth" (p.397), Mrs Hemans, the poetess, becomes Madame de Maintenon and so on, the children's imagination redeeming the promise of the red cardboard box. The experiment which "'exactly carries out some of our ideas about influence and upbringing'", to quote Eleanor (p.393), can be seen signally to have failed.

Imagination versus rigid observance of convention is apparent also in "The Story-Teller" which is set in a railway carriage, where a dull and prosaically-minded aunt is having difficulty controlling her two nieces and nephew to the irritation of the other occupant of the carriage, a bachelor - one of the story-tellers of the title, the other being the aunt. "Most of the aunt's remarks seemed to begin with 'Don't' [like Mrs De Ropp

in "Sredni Vashtar" or the aunt in "The Lumber-Room"] and nearly all of the children's remarks began with 'Why?'" (p.349). Like the children in "The Toys of Peace", they have a lively imagination and a healthy curiosity, which the aunt is bent on suppressing since she is unequal to the demands they continually make on her limited powers of invention. As with all Saki's children they are persistent and remorseless in their questions. The bachelor by contrast has not forgotten what it is like to be a child.

As the children reveal the depth of their boredom, "the frown on the bachelor's face was deepening to a scowl. He was a hard, unsympathetic man, the aunt decided in her mind" (p.350). Of course, in one sense she is right since he is obviously entirely unsympathetic to her, but as far as the children are concerned she could hardly have been further from the truth, as shown by his spinning of a wonderful yarn - a compound of "Little Red Riding Hood", "The Three Little Pigs" and pure invention, which has the children spellbound until the journey ends. Unlike the aunt who was "evidently" not a good storyteller "in their estimation" (p.350) - this time "evidently" can be taken at its face value because it is the children's perception that is being voiced - the bachelor, in parody of the aunt's moral tale, immediately arrests their attention by talking of Bertha who was "'horribly good'. There was a wave of reaction in favour of the story; the word horrible in connection with goodness was a novelty that commended itself" (p.351),³ (the same surprise element that characterises most of Saki's short stories). "It seemed to introduce a ring of truth that was absent from the aunt's tales of infant life" (p.351). The story ends satisfyingly in Bertha's being eaten by a wolf: "all that was left of her were her shoes, bits of clothing, and the three medals for goodness," (p.353).⁴ The aunt sadly remains as dull and unenlightened as formerly, as she reveals in saying, "'A most improper story [...] you have undermined

the effect of years of careful teaching'" (p.354), the word "careful" clearly evoking the repressive regime she favours in her dealings with the children.⁵

While "The Penance" and "Hyacinth" light-heartedly treat follies and hypocrisy in a more sinister way, the more unpleasant realities of life are dealt with in "The Lumber-Room" and "Sredni Vashtar". Since "The Penance" is more akin in treatment and tone to the stories already dealt with briefly above, it is proposed to discuss it next, and then move on to the more serious undercurrents of "The Lumber-Room" and the macabre message of "Sredni Vashtar".⁶

"The Penance"

Before subjecting "The Penance" to a detailed analysis there are several general points to be considered. As in "Sredni Vashtar", Saki uses a curious blend of Christian and pagan imagery throughout to illustrate the conflict between the illusions of the adults and the children's superior ability to separate reality from the appearance of truth. The title itself and the form that the penance takes are Christian but the three children are likened to the Parcae Sisters of classical mythology. Yet by his reiteration of the phrase "blank wall" (pp.423,424,425, 427), Saki calls to mind Belshazzar's Feast (in Daniel, v.5-26) where Belshazzar requires the meaning of the message - a message of doom - that has appeared on the wall to be explained to him. Had Octavian been more enlightened he might have seen "the writing on the wall"; again the children show superior insight and sophistication. It is the man who is childlike, having learned nothing that will fill the blank wall of his mind.

Apart from the religious strands to be disentangled are the philosophical implications. This same phrase "blank wall", recalls the philosophy of the empiricists such as Locke,⁷ who believed that, at birth, the mind was a "tabula rasa" requiring

to be written upon by experience. On a more obvious level, of course, the wall draws attention to the children's inscrutability and may be seen as the symbolic barrier that they have erected against unwanted intrusion - like the facade of Nicholas or Conradin to protect them from the adult world.

Again it is difficult, as with all Saki's stories involving children triumphing in a despotic adult world, not to emphasise the autobiographical element. It is perhaps in this instance merely worth pointing out that if "The Lumber-Room" and "Sredni Vashtar" depict life within the walls, where the children battle against a stifling and autocratic regime, in "The Penance" the reader is afforded a glimpse of life beyond the walls. If the setting of the house is ignored and the significance of the three children, "a girl and two boys" (p.423),⁸ is likewise discounted, nothing is subtracted from the central theme of the story which is that an unenlightened adult is brought forcibly by the actions of the children to pay for his lack of judgement; as Loganbill puts it, "a villain is redeemed".⁹ Parallel to the religious undercurrents the judicial language and imagery are obvious throughout.

The title itself can mean either the act of penitence, i.e. the temporal punishment, or, in theological terms, the sacrament of penance, consisting of three parts: contritio, confessio, satisfactio; and it will become clear that it is used in both these senses. The choice of the name Octavian Ruttle is also significant. Whether Octavian, calling to mind the Roman Emperor Augustus, has some deeper personal and ironic significance is an open question,¹⁰ but the surname, Ruttle, is certainly important. It is a dialect form of rattle in the sense of death-rattle and since he has just pronounced "a sentence of death" (p.422) on the little tabby cat it is apt. The word 'rut' also has 'beastly' connotations, of course, and if ruttle were pronounced 'rootle', as in some dialects, it

would exactly describe the way that pigs forage for food. In any case the surname jars in conjunction with the 'imperial' Christian name and may serve to highlight the conflict between how he wishes to be regarded by the children and how they really see him.

Unlike the "villains" of "The Lumber-Room" and "Sredni Vashtar" Octavian is described as "one of those lively cheerful individuals on whom amiability has set its unmistakable stamp" (p.422). He values his popularity too. "Like most of his kind, his soul's peace depended in large measure on the unstinted approval of his fellows" (p.422). Herein lies the flaw in his nature, for if the peace of his soul depends on how it is viewed by others, then he must be shallow indeed and the "unmistakable stamp" of his "amiability" highlights his superficiality. He does, however, have a conscience and a sense of compassion, for "in hunting to death a small tabby cat he had done a thing of which he scarcely approved himself" (p.422). Although the "gardener had hidden the body in its hastily dug grave under a lone oak tree" (p.422), he is unable to put it out of his mind, and for this reason he is capable of salvation.

The "distasteful and seemingly ruthless deed" (p.422) shows him to be guilty of rash rather than callous actions. He has jumped to the, some would say, justifiable conclusion (Loganbill for one),¹¹ that the cat has been killing his chickens. There is, after all, the circumstantial evidence of the dead chickens and the cat's presence in the vicinity of the hen coop. The punning sentence "Octavian kept chickens; at least he kept some of them; others vanished" (p.422), draws attention to the later irony of this evidence. Further in his defence, he has consulted "those in authority at the grey house" (p.422) (again this is ironic since the children are really in authority over *him*) before "a sentence of death had been agreed on." He has been neither precipitate - the cat

"had been detected in many furtive visits" (p.422)¹² - nor cavalier in his decision.

The verdict is that "'the children will mind, but they need not know'" (p.422), a strange and almost contradictory statement. How can they mind what they do not know? What are they not to know? It says much about the indifference of "those in authority", who are plainly at least as culpable as Octavian. Obviously the children will know that the cat is missing, which they will mind whether or not they realise the reason for it. It must, therefore be concluded that the manner of its going is what they need not know, i.e. Octavian can rest assured that his popular image will not suffer. At this juncture he is more concerned with keeping up appearances than anything else. It is also interesting that the reader does not know how the cat has met its death because the story is told from Octavian's standpoint and he shuts out anything that is to his discredit.

He is already at a loss with the children who are "a standing puzzle" (p.422) to him. His ignorance is stressed by the fact that the reader does not learn their names either and this limited point of view illustrates his limited knowledge. "He considered that he should have known their names, ages, the dates of their birthdays" (p.423) by now, but they remain "as non-committal as the long blank wall [...] over which their three heads sometimes appeared at odd moments" (p.423), their inscrutability in stark contrast to his own open, simple nature. It is clear that he has been interested enough to ask the local people about the children because he has learned that "they had parents in India" (p.423). He also knows that they will be upset by the death of their kitten, but that is the sum total of his knowledge about them. "And now it seemed he was engaged in something which touched them closely" (p.423) (his perplexity is clear) "but must be hidden from their knowledge" (p.423). He is again having to act out of character, duplicity

not being part of his nature any more than cruelty.

His self-justification becomes evident in the next paragraph where the fate of "the poor helpless chickens" (p.423) is touched upon. Certainly "it was meet that their destroyer should come to a violent end" (p.423). "The qualms" (p.423) which he feels come over strongly as he contemplates the "piteous" end of the cat. He is not at all proud of himself, and his step is "less jaunty than usual" (p.423). Unfortunately to compound his unhappiness "as he passed beneath the shadow of the high blank wall" (p.423) (evocative of "the valley of the shadow of death" perhaps?) he "became aware that his hunting had had undesired witnesses" (p.423). "Three white set faces were looking down at him" (p.423). The position of the children on top of the wall is worthy of note since this gives them the advantage of height - they can look down on Octavian in both senses of the phrase. The "threefold¹³ study of cold human hate, impotent yet unyielding, raging yet masked in stillness" (p.423) emphasises their inscrutability while the "triple gaze that met Octavian's eye" (p.423) stresses their unanimity and intensity, the use of the singular "eye" underlining his feeling of isolation.

The "contritio" element of penance (i.e. sorrow for sin) becomes plain in his first words to the children: "'I'm sorry, but it had to be done,' said Octavian, with genuine apology in his voice" (p.423). Just as Octavian has stood in judgement on the cat, so now the children sit in judgement on him. "'Beast!'" (p.423) is their uncompromising verdict. It is a fitting penance that he should later be required to say "'I'm a miserable Beast'" (p.426) and that his absolution should consist of the one word "'Un-Beast'" (p.427). Octavian is not insensitive, however, for in equating "the bunch of human hostility" (p.423) with "the high blank wall" he "wisely decided to withhold his peace overtures till a more hopeful

occasion" (p.423). It is interesting that the "human" status of these judges is stressed, at this stage contrasted with Octavian's status as "beast". Later the trio has more of a godlike significance in relation to Octavian as penitent sinner. The unanimity of their hatred is summed up in "the answer came from three throats with startling intensity" (p.423). Again the trinity is emphasised.

Although at this stage Octavian feels that his killing of the kitten was justified he wants to "atone for the dismal deed" (p.423) by buying a suitable box of chocolates to show his contrition. The humorous description of the boxes he rejects because "one had a group of chickens pictured on its lid, the other bore the portrait of a tabby kitten" (p.423) has two functions: it shows his painstaking efforts to avoid tactlessness, but more than that, it stresses his preoccupation with appearances again. His final choice of "painted poppies [which] Octavian hailed [...] as a happy omen" (p.423) since they are "the flowers of forgetfulness" (p.423) (a reference to opium and presumably by inversion to rosemary, the flower of remembrance) reveals the optimistic nature of the man as well as his inability to appreciate how deep-rooted is the children's condemnation of him.

But his conscience is partially salved in anticipation of their forgiveness; he "felt distinctly more at ease" (p.424) having sent the present to the children, so that "next morning he sauntered with purposeful steps" (p.424) past the long blank wall. This paradoxical phrase illustrates that his seeming insouciance is an attempt to hide the fact that he hopes for evidence that his gesture of conciliation has been accepted. Not so. The children feign not to see him at all; "their range of sight did not seem to concern itself with Octavian's presence" (p.424), though the fact that they "were perched at their accustomed look-out" (p.424) suggests that they are very

much aware of him, and there on purpose to observe him. No sooner has he become "depressingly aware of the aloofness of their gaze" (p.424) than "he also noted" the contents of the box of chocolates scattered all over the grass where the children, with their knowledge of his character, are sure he will find them, and realise that his peace offering has been rejected. "Octavian's blood-money had been flung back at him in scorn" (p.424). The significance of "blood-money" is twofold. It underlines the seriousness of the crime, blood-money being the penalty paid in the old days by a murderer to the family of the victim. It was also intended completely to protect the offender from the vengeance of the injured family. Thus not only has Octavian been unable to atone for his misdeed as he wishes, he is still at the children's mercy.

Worse is to follow, for, "to increase his discomfiture" (p.424), it begins to look as though "the supposed culprit" (p.424) was not to blame after all, and that the cat "had already paid full forfeit" (p.424) with its life to add to Octavian's misery. He cannot undo the wrong. The chickens are still disappearing and "it seemed highly probable that the cat had only haunted the chicken-run to prey on the rats" (p.424). Not only has he killed an innocent creature, he has killed one of his main allies. The unbearable irony adds, to his guilt at having hurt the children, a sense of having done wrong.

Inevitably through servant's gossip the children learn of this "belated revision of verdict" (p.424). Again the judicial analogy is drawn, and they increase his misery by laboriously writing: "'Beast, Rats eaten your chickens'" (p.424). He is more desperate than ever "for an opportunity for sloughing off the disgrace [...] and earning some happier nickname from his three unsparing judges" (p.424). The word "sloughing" complements the accusation of "Beast" with its overtones of a snake shedding its skin. The effect of "disgrace" is an acknowledgement on Octavian's part that he has committed a sin,

i.e. fallen from grace, corresponding to the "confessio" part of the sacrament of penance. Prior to the discovery that the chickens are still being killed, he saw his killing of the cat as regrettable but justifiable. He was sorry for the pain he had caused the children. Now he has to face the fact that he was in error, and for that reason has wronged them also. He needs to redeem his action for his own sake as well as the fact that he cannot bear their uncompromising judgement of him as a "Beast".

It is obvious that he has been casting around for ideas, for "one day a chance inspiration came to him" (p.424). Again, true to nature, he acts impulsively, a characteristic which might be said to have contributed to his present plight. He thinks he may be able to melt "the wall of ice"¹⁴ between him and the children with the help of his two-year-old daughter Olivia. Every day for an hour between lunch and one o'clock, Octavian has charge of his daughter while "the nursemaid gobbled and digested her dinner and novelette" (p.424) as Saki dismissively observes. (As in so many of his stories, there is no mention of a mother.) At this time of day "the blank wall was usually enlivened by the presence of its three small wardens" (p.424). The imagery of "wardens" is interesting, suggesting as it does imprisonment. Ironically the children who are confined by the high blank wall are effectively excluding Octavian from their territory and knowledge of their lives. "With seeming carelessness of purpose" (p.424) (an echo of "sauntered with purposeful steps") he brings his daughter near to the dividing wall and notes "with hidden delight the growing interest that dawned in that hitherto sternly hostile quarter" (p.424). He is so busy disguising his own motives and observing their reactions that he again assumes that the "growing interest" is a sign of the success of his plan, which is to ingratiate himself with them.

He concludes that "his little Olivia, with her sleepy placid ways, was going to succeed where he, with his anxious well-meant overtures, had so signally failed" (p.424). He still has much to learn. This "sleepy placid" daughter of his is a reflection of Octavian himself as he normally is - simple, unquestioning, amiable, and it is a measure of how deeply he feels himself to have fallen from favour that he should evince such anxiety. He brings the baby a dahlia which she accepts passively, "with a stare of benevolent boredom, such as one might bestow on amateur classical dancing performed in aid of a deserving charity" (pp.424-25). Not only is this a humorous thrust at such social occasions, it also has the effect of underlining the amiability of Olivia likened to a member of such an audience together with the good intentions which motivate Octavian just as they underlie a performance in aid of charity. His intentions may be good but he has no idea of how to win the interest or approval of the children.

It is an action in this instance in the cause of reconciliation and he is acting a part for his audience of three. He turns to them "with affected carelessness" (p.425) and asks them if they like flowers. As with the poppies on the lid of the box of chocolates, these may be seen to be flowers of forgetfulness also and with as little success. "Three solemn nods rewarded his venture" (p.425). This is a breakthrough of a sort, though they neither speak nor smile, but it is enough for Octavian to sense that he may be establishing contact with them. His mask of "affected carelessness" (while never for a moment deceiving the children) slips and "with a distinct betrayal of eagerness in his voice" (p.425) he asks them which sort of flowers they like best.

When they ask "child-like" for "what lay farthest from hand" (p.425) Octavian ingenuously attributes their motives to those of typically thoughtless children. He is concerned again only with the superficial inconvenience of their request, entirely

unsuspecting of the calculation behind it, which becomes evident shortly. Octavian "trotted off gleefully to obey their welcome behest" (p.425), "welcome" because it appears to him that he is gaining favour with them at last. The role reversal here is made plain by the fact that he, the adult, is happy to obey and trots off at the children's bidding. It soon becomes apparent, however, that there is nothing child-like in their request; they want Octavian out of the way so that they can put into operation the plan that the presence of the docile Olivia has sown in their minds.

Octavian's frantic plucking of sweet peas "into his bunch that was rapidly becoming a bundle" (p.425) is paralleled by the speed at which the children turn the situation to their advantage. "Far down the meadow three children were pushing a go-cart at the utmost speed they could muster in the direction of the piggeries" (p.425).¹⁵ When Octavian has collected enough flowers he turns round "and found the blank wall blanker and more deserted than ever, while the foreground was void of all trace of Olivia" (p.425). The blankness reflects the slowness of Octavian's reaction; his mind is a blank, he is obviously stunned at the disappearance of Olivia and the children. Again he has misjudged the situation. His non-comprehension is emphasised when Octavian sees the children vanishing towards the piggeries with Olivia: "it was Olivia's go-cart and Olivia sat in it" (p.425). It takes some time for the truth to sink in. It is also interesting that the two-year-old is "apparently retaining her wonted composure of mind" (p.425). This would suggest a maturity beyond her years and certainly in stark contrast to her father, but appearances as ever deceive, because she is clearly rather stupid and like Octavian slow to understand, which gives her the appearance of composure when in fact it merely reflects her non-comprehension. This is borne out later when "as she began to sink gently into the bed of

slime a feeling dawned on her that she was not after all very happy" (p.426).

Octavian only acts rapidly when he is jumping to conclusions; he is slow-witted in a crisis. "Octavian stared for a moment [...] and then started in hot pursuit, shedding as he ran sprays of blossom from the mass of sweet pea that he still clutched in his hands" (p.425). This comic picture has a deep significance. It underlines that in pursuit of Olivia he has forgotten everything except the danger which he has at last perceived is threatening her. The carefully picked flowers and the reason for picking them are discarded in the heat of the moment - ironically he has forgotten his "flowers of forgetfulness". It seems that he is capable of only one thought at a time and tends to act precipitately without due caution; but he does have a proper sense of values and acts impulsively from good intentions more often than not. Unlike the wicked Mrs De Ropp or the domineering kill-joy "aunt" in "The Lumber-Room", he is not essentially evil.

The children have perilously dragged Olivia on to the roof of a sty, whose state of repair makes it certain that it would "not have borne Octavian's weight" (p.425) if he had tried to climb on to it to rescue her. Olivia's reaction to this is "wondering but unprotesting" (p.425), again reflecting her amiable lack of understanding. The children have exchanged the blank wall for "their new vantage ground" (p.425) where they are again in command, once more in a superior position in both senses of the word, Octavian forced to look up to them as he negotiates with them. Even he can accurately read some malicious intent, fear sharpening his perception as in panic he asks, "'What are you going to do with her?'" (p.425). "There was no mistaking the grim trend of mischief in those flushed but sternly composed young faces" (p.425). No longer are they "white set faces" (p.423), they are animated now with revenge

for the death of their kitten, excited at having exchanged their impotence for a strong bargaining position. Like the fiendish Hyacinth in the story of that name they are blackmailing him.

One of the children in answer to his question, betraying his extreme youth as well as evidence that "they had been reading English History" (they are knowledgeable children in contrast to Octavian) proposes, "'Hang her in chains over a slow fire.'"¹⁶ But it is the second proposal "which most alarmed Octavian" (p.425): "'Frow her down and the pigs will d'vour her, every bit 'cept the palms of her hands'" (p.425). This, obviously the voice of a very young child, unnerves him because it is all too likely to happen, given the proximity of the pigs and her precarious position on the roof of the sty. "It was also evident that they had studied Biblical history" (p.425).¹⁷ The word "studied" draws attention to the paradoxical mixture of childish language and Biblical allusion which again stresses that the children have unknown depths unlike the superficial Octavian.

Octavian, a kind man if a fool, finds it hard to believe this, saying, "'You surely wouldn't treat my poor little Olivia in that way?'" (p.426), although the tone - a pleading one - suggests that he does believe it. He is beginning to learn. The children are uncompromising in their answer: "'You killed our little cat'" (p.426), the "little cat" being a mocking dismissal of "poor little Olivia". Their concept of justice is of the Old Testament variety.¹⁸ In the children's eyes Olivia, as the daughter of a "Beast", has the same animal status as a kitten; she is perceived moreover to be as precious to Octavian as their pet was to them. The "stern reminder" (p.426) as if he needed reminding comes in chorus "from three throats" (p.426). They are of one mind and the emphasis on the three takes on a new significance which is explained later.

Octavian assures them, "'I'm very sorry I did'" and Saki observes "if there is a standard of measurement in truth Octavian's statement was assuredly a large nine" (p.426).¹⁹ But despite this measurement of sincere contrition, the girl is quite unmoved, dispassionately pointing out, "'We shall be very sorry when we've killed Olivia [...] but we can't be sorry till we've done it'" (p.426). There is no answer to such "inexorable child-logic" (p.426) despite "Octavian's scared pleadings" (p.426). Like the "high blank wall", the impassive logic of the children is "like an unyielding rampart" (p.426). He is still thrashing around for a new line of approach when Olivia falls "with a soft unctuous splash into a morass of muck and decaying straw" (p.426). The choice of adjective, "unctuous", which complements the grovelling humility of Octavian's position, also suggests extreme unction highlighting both Olivia's peril and Octavian's penance. Initially "after the first shock" (p.426) Olivia is "mildly pleased at [...] close and unstinted contact with the sticky element that oozed around her" (p.426), just as a young child would be, but this gives way to "tentative" crying as she becomes dimly aware of a vague unease, her slow thought processes again being emphasised.

Octavian meanwhile, only too aware of his daughter's danger, is engaged in a desperate battle with "the quagmire, which seemed to have learned the rare art of giving way at all points without yielding an inch," (p.426), as inexorable as the children, while Octavian can be seen to have "given way at all points" and gained nothing. Despite poor Olivia's face contorted with "whimpering wonder", the children remain impervious, looking "down with the cold unpitying detachment of the Parcae Sisters" (p.426), i.e. The Fates, who according to classical legend arbitrarily controlled the birth, life and death of everyone. Like the children, there were three of them, Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. This allusion to the "Parcae Sisters" heralds a subtle shift in the relationship

between the children and Octavian onto a different plane. Instead of their human and his bestial status, they now sit godlike in judgement on him as a human; to this extent he has already redeemed himself by his concern for his child and his true contrition. He is no longer so concerned with appearances.

In the realisation that his child is being steadily sucked into the mud, Octavian gasps, "'I can't reach her in time [...] won't you help her?'" (p.426). The inevitable reminder that "'no one helped our cat'" (p.426) evokes the rash response from Octavian, "'I'll do anything to show you how sorry I am about that'" (p.426). Immediately the children pounce. It is clear that they have already rehearsed the questions that follow: "'Will you stand in a white sheet by the grave?'"', "'Holding a candle?'"', "' An' saying, "I'm a miserable Beast?'"'" (p.426),²⁰ "'For a long, long time?'" (p.427). The breakthrough having come, Octavian is sufficiently self-possessed to make a tentative attempt at bargaining on his own account. "'For half an hour,'" he says, (p.427) but "there was an anxious ring in his voice [...]; was there not the precedent of a German king who did open air penance for several days and nights at Christmas-time clad only in his shirt?" (p.427)²¹ (Any reading of history on Octavian's part must have been long ago or only dimly remembered - unlike the shrewd children.)

"'All right,' came with threefold solemnity from the roof" (p.427). The Trinity of the group is stressed here, the pagan element of their godliness when likened to the Parcae Sisters giving way to a more Christian Being overseeing Octavian's penance. Also Biblical in tone is the phrase "half an hour seemed long and goodly in their eyes" (p.427) which draws attention moreover to their extreme youth. Terms agreed, the children promptly fulfill their part of the pact by producing a ladder which enables him to rescue Olivia. The ironic

observation that "a few minutes later he was listening to the shrill and repeated assurances of the nursemaid that her previous experience of filthy spectacles had been on a notably smaller scale" (p.427), underlines her preoccupation with appearance too. She is merely concerned that the child is in a mess and appears to have overlooked the possibility that Olivia's life might have been in danger. Clearly she is of Octavian's household, and she highlights the standards set by Octavian in the past, but he is learning to judge differently while she remains unenlightened.

The act of penance, the "satisfactio", takes place "that same evening when twilight was deepening into darkness [...] under the lone oak tree" (p.427) (a phrase repeated from page 422) where the cat was hunted to death and is now buried, "having first carefully undressed the part" (p.427) - a punning inversion which shows how seriously Octavian is taking his role as penitent, although it also reveals that he is still very much concerned with correct form. "Clad in a zephyr shirt" (p.427)²² Octavian stands with a candle in one hand and a watch in the other. (If he was hoping to hide, the children have outsmarted him by insisting on the candle). The zephyr shirt "on this occasion thoroughly merited its name" (p.427), a punning reference to the "fairly frequent occasions when the candle succumbed to the night breezes" (p.427). The significance of the oak tree is worth mentioning too. In the Old Testament there are several references to the oak as a sacred tree, sometimes used for burial purposes to mark a grave. In later times or in pagan cultures peasants often superstitiously believed in the oak's sacred properties.²³

The half hour turns out to be as long as the children could wish as Octavian consults his "watch, into which the soul of a dead plumber seemed to have passed" (p.427), time elapsing on leaden feet. But the important thing to Octavian is that "the

house loomed inscrutable in the middle distance" (p.427), like the long blank wall and the mask of the children's faces; but "as Octavian conscientiously repeated the formula of his penance he felt certain that three pairs of solemn eyes were watching his moth-shared vigil" (p.427). The house may be as blankly inscrutable as the wall over which the children's unreadable faces have been wont to appear but Octavian has learned at least a little of what goes on behind the facade. The "three pairs of solemn eyes" have the all-seeing quality of God to Octavian, and the nature of the penance is similar to the ritual of lighting candles in church in supplication. The ludicrous picture²⁴ that Octavian makes standing in his night shirt in the dusk, candle in hand, calls the children's nursery rhyme, "Wee Willie Winkie" to mind, and prompts the thought that in this further evidence of role reversal, Octavian must become childlike in order to be redeemed.²⁵

Had Octavian been worthless he could have reneged on his part of the bargain, after rescuing Olivia, but it is to his credit that he keeps his promise. This is, of course, partly due to the fact that he desperately wants their approval and thus, "the next morning his eyes were gladdened by a sheet of copy-book paper lying beside the blank wall, on which was written the message 'Un-beast'" (p.427). Octavian has received the sign for which he has prayed in much the same way as Conradin in "Sredni Vashtar". The frequent allusions to eyes and sight and seeing call forth the "eye for an eye" vengeance of the Old Testament God as well as symbolising perception and understanding. Because Octavian shows true penitence he does not suffer the ultimate penalty. His fault lies in jumping to conclusions rather than pursuing a deliberately chosen path of oppression, nor is he guilty of hypocrisy (unlike the "aunt" in "The Lumber-Room" or Mrs De Ropp in "Sredni Vashtar"). Because Octavian is not wicked, he is redeemed. His is an error of

judgement, not hubris. If a moral were to be found for this story it might be: "Judge not that ye be not judged."

"The Lumber-Room"

"The Penance", then, reveals the follies of the adult through the children's reaction to him. In all his actions and in his wish to please he is seen to be more childlike than the children who have a clarity of vision that he lacks. This same role reversal features in "The Lumber-Room" but with several important differences which will become apparent.

To the Victorian or Edwardian, the very title, "The Lumber-Room", would immediately have conjured up a "Box of Delights". MacQueen Pope in his book, *Back Numbers*,²⁶ evocative of late Victorian middle-class England, devotes an entire chapter to what he calls "The Box Room", describing his young boyhood and the escape from reality which his "place of magic" afforded him. It seems that to a reader of Saki's period the lumber-room and its mysterious contents full of the promise of adventure were a commonplace in most middle-class homes, and thus much of the sense of anticipation felt by Nicholas in the story would already have been conveyed by the title.

The theme of this story is again a familiar one in the Saki canon: the youthful protagonist versus the despotic adult²⁷ or as Robert Drake puts it: social conflicts between the imaginative - represented by Nicholas - and the "devitalisers"²⁸ (in this case as in so many, the "aunt"). Perhaps one of the most startling features is Saki's understanding of child psychology; this story is told not from the adult standpoint but from the point of view of the child, distance lending not enchantment, but merely the vocabulary to convey the experiences and thought processes of a child, perfectly reproduced.

Nicholas is portrayed as intelligent, shrewd and imaginative,

while his "aunt" by contrast is petty, stupid and vindictive. Given these characteristics it is hardly surprising that she is a victim of her own shortcomings which Nicholas exploits to his own ends. The opening three sentences, in the voice and tone of the domineering aunt, briskly and directly involve the reader in what is to follow by inducing in quick succession, first a sense of anticipation: "The children were to be driven, as a special treat, to the sands at Jagborough" (p.371); then dismay: "Nicholas was not to be of the party; he was in disgrace" (p.371); and finally utter surprise: "Only that morning he had refused to eat his wholesome bread-and-milk on the seemingly frivolous ground that there was a frog in it" (p.371). The word "seemingly" is explained two sentences later: "The dramatic part of the incident was that there really was a frog in Nicholas' basin of bread-and -milk" (p.372). This is confounding until the obvious but no less astonishing explanation is given that "he had put it there himself, so he felt entitled to know" (p.372). The whole story is full of such inversions, surprising because so inconceivable, satisfying because the explanations when they come are so simple. Now there is the promise of all manner of improbable possibilities in Saki's looking-glass world.²⁹ Right from the outset it is clear that nothing is at it seems, and the child's perception of truth is superior to the adult's.

For Nicholas the important "fact that stood out clearest in the whole affair [...] was that the older, wiser and better people [a phrase repeated from p.371] had been proved to be profoundly in error in matters about which they had expressed the utmost assurance" (p.372).³⁰ His 'aunt' meanwhile has tried to justify herself by enlarging on "the sin of taking a frog from the garden and putting it into a bowl of wholesome bread-and-milk" (p.372). Unable to deny the truth of Nicholas's repeated point ("'You said there couldn't possibly be a frog in my bread-and-milk; there was a frog in my bread-and-milk'", p.372) she changes the subject and her self-righteous tone is clear in the

ironic religious imagery of the phrases "fell from grace", "sinned collectively" and "depravity" (p.372).

Nicholas's punishment then is to be excluded from the trip to the beach. "A few decent tears were looked for on the part of Nicholas when the moment for the departure of the expedition arrived" (p.372), but again surprisingly, Nicholas is cheerful (a fact calculated to annoy his aunt) and "the party drove off without any of the elation of high spirits that should have characterised it" (p.372). There is an apparent inconsistency which leads to the suspicion that Nicholas has somehow planned the entire situation for some reason of his own. Similar confrontations must have taken place in the past between the aunt and the children if "it was her habit, whenever one of the children fell from grace, to improvise something of a festival nature from which the offender would be rigorously debarred" (p.372). What then is the purpose of Nicholas's deliberate ploy whereby he is excluded from the treat? This does not become clear immediately.

In an attempt to induce the proper feeling of disappointment in Nicholas his odious aunt says, "'How they will enjoy themselves!'" (p.373), but, unimpressed, Nicholas points out that Bobby's boots are too tight. To the aunt's indignant question, "'Why didn't he tell me they were hurting?'" (p.373) he retorts, "'He told you twice, but you weren't listening. You often don't listen when we tell you important things'" (p.373). Nicholas is dismissive of his "aunt" in other ways too - not even according her the status of aunt (she "insisted, by an unwarranted stretch of imagination, in styling herself his aunt also", p.372). She is merely a bogus figure of authority like Mrs De Ropp or "those in authority" in "The Penance", one of the "wiser adults" whom he has proved wrong. This denial of identity is similar in purpose and tone to Conradin's scornful

naming of his guardian "The Woman", or the children in "The Penance" calling Octavian "Beast".

Even more revealing of the aunt's character is her response to this charge of negligence - not a denial of its truth, nor, surprisingly, a warning against insolence - but another change of subject. (This same technique of evasion is employed by the aunt in "The Story-Teller" too). It seems to be her only defence against Nicholas's barbs. She forbids him to go into the gooseberry garden. Nicholas on the other hand, already demonstrating his moral superiority, is not afraid to confront issues. "'Why not?'" he demands (p.373). In her unsuspecting way she replies, "'Because you are in disgrace'" (p.373).

"Nicholas did not admit the flawlessness of the reasoning; he felt perfectly capable of being in disgrace and in a gooseberry garden" as Saki sylleptically observes (p.373). There is a further irony here, for if the commandment not to enter the gooseberry garden seems to have the overtones of a "forbidden paradise" (p.373) about it, it becomes perfectly clear how by analogy Nicholas can feel capable of being in disgrace and in the 'Garden of Eden' at the same time. He is as ever several steps ahead of the aunt.

Nicholas now begins to see the possibilities in allowing his aunt to believe that the gooseberry garden is his goal and by making "one or two sorties [...] with obvious stealth" (p.373), the oxymoron drawing attention to his forward planning and her stupidity, towards one or other of the two doors into the forbidden garden ensures that she will be kept "on self-imposed sentry-duty for the greater part of the afternoon" (p.373). As "a woman of few ideas, with immense powers of concentration" (p.373) she has allowed herself to be manipulated by the devious child, the irony being that in seeking to punish Nicholas she effectively punishes herself. This tunnel vision is a quality that she shares with Mrs De Ropp.

Having neatly dealt with the obstacle of his aunt he "rapidly put into execution a plan of action that had long germinated in his brain" (p.373), as opposed to the adults who "improvise" and make up the rules as they go along. At last Nicholas's bizarre and mischievous behaviour is explained. There follows a description of his anticipation of the "mysteries of the lumber-room" (p.374), the "unknown land, compared with which the gooseberry garden was a stale delight, a mere material pleasure" (p.374). He has practised unlocking the schoolroom door since he "had not much experience of the art of fitting keys into keyholes" (p.374) (he realises his shortcomings) and he knows that he can reach the "fat, important-looking key" (p.373) to the lumber-room by standing on a chair to reach the shelf in the library where it is hidden. Unlike his unimaginative, impetuous aunt, "he did not believe in trusting too much to luck and accident" (p.374), although the clear implication is that he is ready to do so if necessary (has in fact already done so), and events prove that he is not only a careful strategist but an inspired opportunist also, like the children in "The Penance".

At last the lumber-room is open to view and the voyage of discovery begun. Saki states simply, "It came up to his expectations" (p.374).³¹ Again the boy has a wisdom superior to his aunt who is constantly being surprised by events. His sense of wonder at "that region that was so carefully sealed from youthful eyes" (p.374) takes on the mystical quality of a hero's journey or a religious experience. It is described as "large and dimly lit" (p.374) (in significance like the 'cathedral' tool-shed in "Sredni Vashtar") with "one high window opening on to the forbidden garden" (p.374) described on p.373 as "the forbidden paradise" and thus evocative of 'The Garden of Eden'. The significance of the "key", "the mysteries", the "unknown land" and dismissal of "material pleasure" all combine to reinforce Nicholas's perception of the lumber-room as "a storehouse of unimagined treasures" (p.374), a phrase which

suggests 'storing up treasure in Heaven.'

Nicholas is very much a loner, the stuff of which pioneers are made - independent-minded, ruthless and with a strong sense of self. He has no need to take anyone into his confidence, there is no sense of sharing or consultation or equality; the reader follows where he leads, as little party to his surprises as the adult against whom he is pitting himself. Because Nicholas is a loner only his actions proclaim his purpose, his reactions reveal his thoughts and the surprise element is preserved. This has the effect of drawing attention to the transparent stupidity of the aunt whose motives can be all too plainly understood.

As soon as Nicholas crosses the threshold his eye alights on "a piece of framed tapestry that was evidently meant to be a fire-screen" (p.374) the word "evidently" drawing attention to the fact that Nicholas is perfectly aware of its original purpose. The adults with their blinkered hidebound preconceptions only see the obvious, but to Nicholas "it was a living, breathing story" (p.374). This is one of many treasures which his "aunt-by-assertion" has consigned "to dust and damp by way of preserving them" (p.374) as Saki ironically observes. Even the roll of Indian carpet on which he is sitting cannot disguise "beneath a layer of dust" the "wonderful colours" glowing there (p.374). The tapestry is described in detail together with Nicholas's rapt response to it. "But did the huntsman see [he wonders] what Nicholas saw, that four galloping wolves were coming in his direction through the wood?" The man "had only two arrows left in his quiver, and he might miss with one or both of them" (p.374). As he scornfully notes, "all one knew about his skill in shooting was that he could hit a large stag at a ridiculously short range" (pp.374-75). The analytical child mind is seen clearly at work here. The hunter is obviously another inept and blind adult, foolishly exulting in

'victory' only to be robbed of it. The adults as hunters reveal the children as victims in a manner calculated to enlist the reader's sympathy on the side of the children.

Dispassionately abandoning the figures on the tapestry to a potentially grisly fate (in which respect he resembles Saki's other child figures as in "The Penance", "The Story-Teller" etc.), Nicholas turns his attention to the other contents of the lumber-room. His delight in the exotic and curious objects is evident and natural ("the twisted candlesticks in the shape of snakes" [p.375] for instance, again evokes comparison with the Garden of Eden), but in examining the "less promising [...] large square book with plain black covers" (p.375) (reminiscent of a Family Bible perhaps?) he has already made another important discovery - that appearances are deceptive. As Nicholas turns the pages of the "whole portrait gallery of undreamed of creatures" (p.375), relating them to his own limited experience, the intrusion of his aunt's voice in "shrill vociferation of his name" (p.375) is an irritant to the reader also. She is "engaged in energetic and rather hopeless search for him among the artichokes and raspberry canes" (p.375), a double irony since in the first place he is not in the garden, but had he been he "could effectually disappear from view amid the masking growth..." (p.373). "'Nicholas, Nicholas!' she screamed! 'You are to come out of this at once [...] I can see you all the time'" (p.375). This preposterous lie underlines the folly of the adults who do not see what is there - the hunter in the tapestry does not see the wolves, visible only to the child - and claim to see what is not there. Saki at his most subtle merely remarks, "It was probably the first time for twenty years that any one had smiled in that lumber-room".³² Since no-one but the aunt "and such-like privileged persons" (p.374) have entered its sacred portals in the last twenty years the impression of their joyless prosaic minds is conveyed together with the fact that Nicholas has

caught the aunt out in a patent falsehood.

It is also significant that Nicholas deliberately ignores his aunt and calls to mind how she often doesn't hear when the children tell her something important. When she screams "gave way to a shriek and a cry for somebody to come quickly" (p.375), the calculating nature of Nicholas's response ought to be chilling, but so thoroughly has the reader entered into the conspiracy, and so detestable and mean-spirited is the aunt, that it merely elicits ungrudging admiration. "Nicholas shut the book, restored it carefully to its place in a corner, and shook some dust from a neighbouring pile of newspapers over it" (p.375). Nothing is overlooked in his care to restore everything to its former appearance.

The dialogue which follows further demonstrates the superiority of Nicholas's reasoning and debating powers and the stupidity and deceit of the aunt. His first question, "'Who's calling?'" (p.375), is deliberately provocative, since he most certainly knows the answer, but his aunt falls into the trap as awkwardly as she has fallen into the rain-water tank. "'Me', came the answer from the other side of the wall" (p.375), an arrogant and self-centred response. She explains that she has fallen into the tank in her search for him in the gooseberry garden. It is interesting to speculate how she could have "'slipped into the rain-water tank'" (p.376) unless it was at ground level which would be most unusual. The likelihood is that she would have had to climb up (the "energetic" nature of her search would bear this out) and would probably have fallen head first into the tank - a ludicrous picture which rivals Octavian Ruttle in his nightshirt in its undignified absurdity. She adds in typically obtuse fashion, "'luckily there's no water in it, but the sides are slippery and I can't get out'" (p.376). There is a double irony here. If there had been water in the

tank, while she would certainly have got wet, which would have been a further insult to her dignity, she could have floated out. But, more importantly, since it is a measure of her stupidity, what use is a rain water tank if there is no water in it? This distorted perception of what is "lucky" or useful calls to mind the lumber-room itself containing what the aunt believes to be useless objects while to Nicholas it is "a storehouse of unimagined treasures" (p.374).

She is at his mercy, and he is happy to savour the moment, so that in answer to her command, "'fetch the little ladder'" (p.376), Nicholas "promptly" and self-righteously points out, "'I was told I wasn't to go into the gooseberry garden'" (p.376). To this she replies, "'I told you not to, and now I tell you that you may'" (p.376). This remark - imperious, irrational, contradictory - sums up her worst attributes. But it also highlights the subtlety of Nicholas's mind which has escaped her - the implicit inconsistency of the aunt's search for him in the gooseberry-garden where she has expressly forbidden him to go. Not only is she capable of only one idea at a time, namely, that he will have to enter the forbidden zone in order to rescue her, but it also appears that she accepts the likelihood of his ability to outwit her. Thus the boy wins by obeying her, and she loses because she assumes that she will be disobeyed.

Nicholas further objects, "'Your voice doesn't sound like aunt's'" (there would be an element of distortion if she were shouting from the confines of a tank) and adds, "'You may be the Evil One tempting me to be disobedient'" (p.376). Again the religious overtones are evident, Satan in the pit being called to mind here. His revenge has never been sweeter as he continues, "'Aunt often tells me that the Evil One tempts me and that I always yield. This time I'm not going to yield'" (p.376). The mindless attempts at discipline which would be all too transparent to a child of his intelligence can be readily

deduced. Instead of changing tack as a more reasonable or imaginative woman might, "the prisoner in the tank", retorts, "'Don't talk nonsense [...] go and fetch the ladder'" (p.376). This single sentence seems to contain three points of significance. Firstly as "prisoner" she is hardly in a strong position and her tone is still peremptory, secondly, if he is talking "nonsense" it is nonsense that he has learnt from her, and lastly she still has not said "please", a word whose omission would assuredly have attracted her disapproval had roles been reversed.

Undaunted Nicholas baits another trap, so thoroughly is he enjoying her discomfiture. He asks if there will be "'strawberry jam for tea'" (p.376), the predictable response - another blatant lie - furnishing him with the *coup de grâce* which he exultantly delivers: "'Now I know you are the Evil One [...] Oh, Devil, you have sold yourself!'" (p.376). The irony here is that Nicholas knows perfectly well that when the aunt said that there was no jam for tea on the previous day she was lying, but here he is pretending that his aunt would not lie and therefore the disembodied voice in the tank cannot be that of his aunt. It is interesting that "Nicholas knew, with childish discernment" that the "unusual sense of luxury in being able to talk to an aunt as though one were talking to the Evil One" should not be "overindulged" (p.376). From this it is clear that Nicholas has more self-control and far more insight than the adults and furthermore has succeeded in resisting temptation - again the religious parallels are implicit in the word "luxury" with its connotations of sinful excess. In walking away he has effectively said, 'Get thee behind me, Satan'.

The setting of the last paragraph is at the tea table where "tea that evening was partaken of in a fearsome silence" (p.376), the word "partaken" highlighting the strained gentility of the proceeding. This is a perfect antithesis of the opening

paragraph which alludes to the scene at breakfast where the altercation about the frog suggests the reverse of silence. But everything has turned out as Nicholas predicted. The children have had a miserable time since "there had been no sands to play on - a circumstance that the aunt had overlooked in the haste of organizing her punitive expedition" (p.376). The "punitive expedition" is the so-called "special treat" described in paragraph one and underlines the hypocrisy of the aunt in pretending that the other children are being rewarded when instead her sole intention is to punish Nicholas. "The tightness of Bobby's boots had had disastrous effect on his temper" (p.376) and the aunt has suffered the ignominious punishment of "undignified" and (in her view) "unmerited detention in a rain-water tank for thirty-five minutes" (pp.376-77).³³

The self-possession which Nicholas displays at the outset is matched by his composure at the end of the story where his cousins have been exploited, his aunt routed and "as for Nicholas, he, too was silent, in the absorption of one who has much to think about" (p.377). But is he contemplating his misdeeds? Of course not; "it was just possible, he considered, that the huntsman would escape with his hounds while the wolves feasted on the stricken stag" (p.377) (which constitutes a pyrrhic victory for the huntsman). The blood-thirsty little boy has created a merciful solution to the story of the tapestry, perhaps as an expression of his inward satisfaction. The ending is similar in tone to Conradin's eating another piece of toast in "Sredni Vashtar", stressing as it does the extreme self-possession indicative of inner strength. On a symbolic level Nicholas revolving in his mind the story of the tapestry draws attention to the analogy of the aunt as 'hunter' and Nicholas as 'hunted'. The aunt, like the hunter lives to hunt another day (unlike the guardian in "Sredni Vashtar"), but the wolves, like Nicholas, get the prize. Just as Nicholas can picture them

feasting on the stag which allows the hunter to escape, so the lumber-room was full of "wonderful things for the eye to feast on" (p.374).³⁴

As Drake says, "Saki's continual thesis regarding children seems to be that their conduct is more nearly rational than that of the decorous adults because they have not yet learned the deceptions and hypocrisies of civilisation".³⁵ While there is nothing particularly decorous about the aunt and while it seems that Nicholas has acquired a useful repertoire of deceptions of his own, there is no doubt that his behaviour is consistent and justified in the light of his "aunt's" arbitrary and irrational behaviour. He at least knows the nature of truth, and understands hypocrisy in a way that his aunt does not.

The choice of title is apt and not merely because of its significance to Saki's contemporaries earlier mentioned. While the exploration of the room is a small part of the story, it is nevertheless the focal point which helps to explain Nicholas's actions in the light of his underlying purpose. Everything he has done, all his seemingly inexplicable behaviour, is part of a predetermined plan, prompted by his knowledge of his aunt's character, to leave the coast clear so that he can explore the lumber-room. Add to this the aunt's perception of lumber as a collection of useless odds and ends (just as the disused toolshed in 'Sredni Vashtar' is seen as redundant) when in fact it is such a paradise for Nicholas, and the meaning of the whole story can be seen to hinge on the contrasting perceptions of child and adult and the superior wisdom of the child.

The same themes that recur throughout Saki's short stories are obvious in "The Lumber-Room". As John Letts points out: "If Thurber saw life in terms of a Battle of the Sexes, there are some grounds for thinking that Saki saw it in terms of a war

between the adult and the young and free".³⁶ Here as in so many other stories the contest is between an adult and a young child, in this instance Nicholas scoring a temporary victory over the aunt.³⁷ What makes the story unique to Saki is his ability to see things through the child's eyes, to apply a child's logic to the actions of the adults in such a way as to reveal them as they are and not as they seem.³⁸

His brilliant gift for the absurd is again brought into play in the aunt's dealings with recalcitrant children so that the ridiculous dilemma in which she finds herself is a fitting retribution. Retribution is itself, of course, a recurrent theme. Even animals so prevalent throughout Saki's writing figure here, the frog in the bread-and-milk as a kind of catalyst, and the wolves in the tapestry in their typically savage role. The deliberate act of putting a frog in the bread-and-milk, which is so surprising to the adult with conditioned preconceptions, makes perfect sense to Nicholas; and so perfectly does Saki represent the child's point of view it seems reasonable to the reader by comparison with the clear irrationality of the aunt.

It is possible to follow Loganbill's lead and interpret the story in terms of an initiation rite,³⁹ whereby the key, the threshold, and the exploration of the lumber-room itself are seen as a symbolic initiation into mysteries revealed to Nicholas but not to the unimaginative world peopled by his aunt and his dull cousins and "quite uninteresting younger brother" (p.372). The same analysis can be applied to tales such as "Sredni Vashtar" and is a cogent interpretation.

Philip Stevick⁴⁰ agrees with the initiation theory but carries it one stage further, defining it in terms of Freudian symbolism. If so this would be an unusual element in a Saki story. While it is true that several of the images - the key, the candlesticks like snakes, the teapot with its spout, for

instance - might be accorded a sexual significance there are one or two anomalies. As Loganbill points out, there are two doors into the forbidden garden, since the story depends on the aunt being forced to patrol the area between them, but if as the aunt believes Nicholas has gained access to the garden by scaling the wall, what of the Freudian significance then?

The choice of the name 'Nicholas' is in itself interesting, suggesting as it does the conflict between saint and devil, innocence and corruption; certainly elements of both characteristics are present in Nicholas.⁴¹ It is also significant that the other main character, the aunt, has no name, and in his ruthlessly logical way, Nicholas denies her even the status of aunt, uncharitably viewing her self-styling as yet another of her failures of judgement or truth. The other characters in the story are merely dimly perceived 'extras', only Bobby having a name and his status - cousin or despised younger brother - unknown.⁴²

Saki's ability to get right into the mind of a child has been justly celebrated by Porterfield⁴³ and by Bilton,⁴⁴ who thinks that "'The Lumber-Room' reveals a child's mind in a manner no less remarkable for being autobiographical".⁴⁵ But whether this is accepted or not, no discussion of the role of the child in Saki's stories would be complete without reference to "The Lumber-Room", described by Letts as a "classic".⁴⁶ In fact, so highly is that story regarded by Brian Inglis⁴⁷ that he devotes half an article to a discussion of "The Lumber-Room" on the grounds of its exclusion from a selection of short stories he is reviewing - an irony which it is tempting to think Saki would have appreciated.

"Sredni Vashtar"

If the tone of "The Lumber-Room" is more sombre than "The Penance" or most of Saki's other short stories in this chapter, then "Sredni Vashtar" is grim, serious and has been thought to rival the stories of W.W. Jacobs for its sinister undercurrents. Among Saki's most celebrated short stories, "Sredni Vashtar" (pp.136-140) is variously described as a "creepy gruesome tale",⁴⁸ "the finest of his sketches in the macabre",⁴⁹ "one of Saki's handful of masterpieces"⁵⁰ and the product of someone whose "soul was not quite sane".⁵¹ Many other critics have discussed it but with very few exceptions (notably Robert Drake and Dean Loganbill who will be discussed later) they mention the autobiographical content, in particular the despotic regime of Hector's Aunt Augusta, and seem happy to leave it at that. Graham Greene aroused a storm of protest from Ethel Munro in saying of "Sredni Vashtar": "Unhappiness wonderfully aids the memory, and the best stories of Munro are all of childhood, its humour, and its anarchy as well as its cruelty and unhappiness."⁵² This is very possibly true but it does not examine the moral, if there is one, or at any rate the underlying theme of the tale, which is the struggle, in this instance mortal, between the boy and his guardian, between truth and hypocrisy. As Fogle eloquently expresses it, "'Sredni Vashtar' reverberates beyond its limits"⁵³ and close examination of the text may reveal why.

The plight of Conradin is baldly stated in the opening sentence. He "was ten years old, and the doctor had pronounced his professional opinion that the boy would not live another five years" (p.136). This calls to mind the opening of "Laura" (p.241), where the doctor is proved right to within a day.⁵⁴ Conradin is able to discount the doctor's prognosis since the latter is "silky and effete" (p.136), a phrase which shows that there is more form than substance to the man, that he is pliant

to Mrs De Ropp's will. She, on the other hand, his cousin and guardian, is of the same opinion, in fact, actively wants to hear that verdict and she is a force to be reckoned with. "In his eyes she represented those three-fifths of the world that are necessary and disagreeable and real" (p.136). All that he has to counter this unequal opposition is "himself and his imagination" (p.136), in which respect he resembles Nicholas. He has no real hopes of survival since "illnesses and coddling restrictions and drawn-out dulness" (p.136) threaten to stifle him; that is, Mrs De Ropp has willed it otherwise.

The crucial differences between Mrs De Ropp and Conradin are not only her stupidity and his imagination but her wilful blindness and his intellectual honesty. Early in the story his moral superiority is established, a core of integrity which remains unassailable and proves to be his salvation. She "might have been dimly aware" (p.136) that she enjoyed "thwarting him 'for his good'" but she "would never, in her honestest moments, have confessed to herself that she disliked Conradin" (p.136). (The fact that she thinks in degrees of honesty underlines her innate hypocrisy.) This conveys to the reader the smug self-righteousness of her behaviour, and her inability to see what to others must have been obvious in her attitude to Conradin, that thwarting him was not a "duty" (p.136) but a pleasure - again the antagonism between Nicholas and the aunt is brought to mind. Conradin by contrast "hated her with a desperate sincerity which he was perfectly able to mask" (pp.136-37). He is her superior on two counts; not only is he honest with himself, he is capable of disguising his feelings, a vital weapon in his limited armoury, and one common to most of Saki's child protagonists.⁵⁵

His pleasures are few but they gain immeasurably "from the likelihood that they would be displeasing to his guardian" (p.137), an element of childish spite that has the ring of truth

about it. She is "locked out" from his imagination as "an unclean thing, which should find no entrance" (p.137). Later it becomes apparent that there are analogies which may be drawn to Sredni Vashtar's cage, another locked secret from which she is debarred.

Corresponding to the oppressive "three-fifths of the world" (p.136) are "the dull, cheerless garden", the "many windows that were ready to open with a message not to do this or that" and the "reminder that medicines were due" (p.137). These recall the "drawn-out dulness", "coddling restrictions" and "illnesses" earlier mentioned (p. 136). In this unpromising garden Mrs De Ropp forbids the picking of fruit - just as Nicholas is forbidden the delights of the gooseberry garden - deluding herself even about the value of the fruit trees. More important is her failure of judgement in the matter of the shed. It is "in a forgotten corner [...] almost hidden behind a dismal shrubbery [...] a disused tool-shed" (p.137). Again appearances deceive. Given life by Conradin's imagination and memory it becomes something between "a playroom" (he is only ten years old) "and a cathedral" (he is mature beyond his years and his soul is being starved). This secret place of Conradin's has magic properties similar to those of "The Lumber-Room" for Nicholas; a place of escape and for the exercise of his fertile imagination.

More wonderful than this, however, are "two inmates of flesh and blood [...] a ragged-plumaged Houdan hen" for him to love and "a large pole-cat ferret" (p.137) for him to worship, these two elements of his nature being starved by Mrs De Ropp. "A friendly butcher-boy had once smuggled [the ferret] cage and all [...] in exchange for a long-secreted hoard of small silver" (p.137). This imparts yet more crucial information about Conradin's character: he is tenacious, a forward planner and capable of outwitting his guardian, more qualities that he shares with Nicholas. It is more readily believable that

Conradin could get hold of a ferret than many another pet, his contact with the outside world being severely limited. The butcher boy with whom he has obviously had furtive dealings would keep ferrets for rabbiting and the nature of the animal, vicious and carnivorous, makes it the perfect choice of instrument for his guardian's death as it turns out. The fact that ferrets are short-sighted, like Mrs De Ropp, and according to Bewick have "a natural attachment to everything that is corrupt"⁵⁶ adds to the ironic piquancy of her fate.

The ferret's hutch is "divided into two compartments, one of which was fronted with close iron bars" (p.137). On a symbolic level the ferret and the cage correspond to Conradin and his life: the ferret behind bars is Conradin as he appears to the outside world, but the unseen compartment is like Conradin's imagination, secret and apart.⁵⁷ It has a further more functional significance which becomes evident at the denouement of the story. When Mrs De Ropp beards Sredni Vashtar in his cage in the belief that it is guinea pigs that she will find, had Sredni Vashtar been visible in the barred part of his cage even with her short sight she would have been saved. But he has obviously withdrawn to his inner sanctum which corresponds to Conradin's inner thoughts, and this is what causes her downfall. She has to unlock the cage to find out the truth.

Conradin is "dreadfully afraid" of the ferret but values it all the more. He is aware of its power, and keeps its presence "scrupulously from the knowledge of the Woman" (p.137). "Scrupulously" underlines both his basic honesty and her lack of scruple. Just as he disparages her as "the Woman" so he elevates the ferret to the status of a god, bestowing on him the wonderful name of "Sredni Vashtar", redolent of things Russian and remote and romantic - an heroic, god-like name. It is interesting that the name Conradin itself has many of these properties and would almost certainly call to mind the

contemporary writer Joseph Conrad ("Sredni Vashtar" was written in 1910).

The perfunctory nature of Mrs De Ropp's religion is compared to the "mystic and elaborate ceremonial before the wooden hutch" with "red flowers in their season and scarlet berries in the winter-time" (p.137). Unlike the passive religion of "the Woman" Sredni Vashtar "laid some special stress on the fierce impatient side of things" (p.137). Noteworthy here is the fact that the apparently passive Conradin worships a fierce god, while the Woman's religion "went to great lengths in the contrary direction" (p.138). She hypocritically worships a patient god although she is impatient, and thus it is a fitting irony that her death should be meted out by the impatient god, Sredni Vashtar. Conradin is obliged to attend Mrs De Ropp's church service which is "an alien rite in the House of Rimmon" (p.137) - a reference to II Kings, v, 18, where Naaman after being cured of leprosy by Elisha begs his leave to worship the Babylonian god of storms when with his master. Conradin likewise has no choice in the matter of worship when with his guardian but the implication is that like Naaman he believes in the true god, (i.e. Sredni Vashtar) who will effect his cure. His own religion which he practises in secret has exacting rituals which satisfy his craving for spiritual sustenance.

The "powdered nutmeg [which] was strewn in front of his hutch" (p.138) has to be stolen, presumably because this increases the danger and thereby enhances the solemnity of the ritual. It is also the action of a naughty child in defiance of all that Mrs De Ropp stands for. Even at his most imaginative Conradin's sense of reality is present. He "almost succeeded in persuading himself that Sredni Vashtar was personally responsible for the toothache" (p.138) that laid Mrs De Ropp low for three days. It is fortuitous that she recovers before the grated nutmeg runs out, but he is all the time aware of the

reality: he can recognise wishful thinking and coincidence. The choice of nutmeg as a votive offering is itself interesting. It may be that as a sickly child on a restricted diet of the bread-and-milk sort (such as that desecrated by Nicholas to such good effect in "The Lumber-Room") Conradin was occasionally allowed a sprinkling of nutmeg in order to make it more palatable. Or perhaps Conradin, in his child-like way, has chosen it as a carminative for the mitigation of one of the polecat-ferret's less god-like propensities.

The other inmate of the shed, the hen, exists only to be loved and does not figure in the worship. Conradin "had long ago settled that she was an Anabaptist" (p.138). Since Mrs De Ropp represents "all respectability" he not unreasonably hopes that being an Anabaptist is "dashing and not very respectable" (p.138). What is worthy of note here is that, again true to character, Conradin "did not pretend to have the remotest knowledge as to what an Anabaptist was" (p.138) and the probability is that he had heard the term discussed by Mrs De Ropp disapprovingly from the depths of her bigotry and ignorance. The irony, of course, is that Conradin's perception of the "dashing" nature of the Anabapist could hardly be farther from the truth but the pernicious nature of Mrs De Ropp's overweening prejudice is clearly voiced.

Short-sighted she may be, but eventually "Conradin's absorption in the tool-shed began to attract the notice of his guardian" (p.138). In this struggle for mastery of Conradin's soul it is necessary for this enterprise to be frustrated. Thus on the pretext that "'it is not good for him to be pottering down there in all weathers'" (p.138), she removes and sells the Houdan hen - the only thing he has to love. Not only is she guilty of cruelty but she is again dishonest with herself in giving her reasons for depriving him of his pet. It is significant too that she has only spotted the hen at this juncture, a fact which

exposes her short-sightedness in both senses. She has assumed that the hen is the sole reason for his visiting the shed. Her vindictiveness is plain also. "With her short-sighted eyes she peered at Conradin" (p.138) waiting for his reaction to her hateful news. "But Conradin said nothing: there was nothing to be said" (p.138). This sentence underlines the enormity of what she has done and Conradin's wonderful self-containment perfected over many years of privations.

Even the insensitive Mrs De Ropp feels that she has gone too far this time and offers him toast for tea, "a delicacy which she usually banned on the ground that it was bad for him" (p.138) - again she reveals her hypocrisy - and "also because the making of it 'gave trouble', a deadly offence in the middle-class feminine eye" (p.138). The irony here is the distortion of values: the nature of the "deadly offence" is such a trifling matter compared to the hideous cruelty which she has just inflicted on the boy of whose welfare she pretends to be so solicitous. The "qualms" felt by Mrs De Ropp have come too late for her salvation unlike Octavian in "The Penance" who feels "qualms" which motivate him to propitiate the children. She pays the ultimate penalty for her "deadly offence".

When he refuses the toast, she exclaims "with an injured air" (as if she is the wronged party and not the offender - her ability to fool herself is boundless), "'I thought you liked toast'" (p.138). He replies, "'Sometimes'" (p.138). This uncompromising answer (the first word he has spoken, and the only one he addresses to her) encapsulates the nature of Conradin's superiority and marks a turning point in the story. By saying that, he acknowledges that she is making a concession and he chooses to reject it, just as the children in "The Penance" reject Octavian's peace offering of chocolates. Conradin is not to be bought off so cheaply. He has spotted a weakness in her, that she is not impervious to that "white set

face" (p.138),⁵⁸ whether because of some premonition that she has gone too far, or some faint compunction. The one word illustrates the steel within him. This economy with words (the children in "The Penance" calling Octavian "Beast" is another example) contrasts starkly with the bluster of the adults. "'Sometimes'" also points to the moment of her downfall, to be remembered later in his triumphant eating of toast at the end of the story. His passive acceptance is banished and a more active role begins in the life and death struggle.

Conradin now asks of Sredni Vashtar a boon, the nature of which is unstated since the ferret as a god "must be supposed to know" (pp.138-39), and the reader is left to deduce its nature also. "Choking back a sob [...] Conradin went back to the world he so hated" (pp.138|j). He has been dealt an almost mortal blow, his last tenuous hope now lying with this unspecified "boon". His "bitter litany" is repeated "every evening in the dusk of the tool-shed" and "every night, in the welcome darkness of his bedroom" (p.139), welcome because he is safe from his guardian's scrutiny and can give free rein to his imagination, Conradin is living a twilight existence, confined as he is by the restrictions and petty domination of Mrs De Ropp, as much a captive as Sredni Vashtar in his dark cage - his potential saviour.

Inevitably the woman "noticed that the visits to the shed did not cease" (p.139) and having found the locked hutch assumes in her purblind way that he is keeping guinea pigs. Predictably she decides, "'I'll have them all cleared away'" (p. 139). Conradin's reaction is interesting. He "shut his lips tight" (p.139). He does not make it easy for her. She must be allowed to take full responsibility for her fate by ransacking "his bedroom till she found the carefully hidden key" (p.139). ("Carefully" reveals his forward planning and his understanding of her character. Has he hidden it where she will find it?)

If he helps her she may wonder why he is being unusually cooperative. On a moral level, however, it is necessary that she should choose in her hubris to pursue this course and thereby effect her own downfall.

From his strategic post at the dining room window Conradin watches the woman disappearing into the shed to make the discovery, this time fatally, that she is once again in error. He can imagine her "opening the door of the sacred hutch and peering down with her short-sighted eyes [...] Perhaps she would prod at the straw in her clumsy impatience. And Conradin fervently breathed his prayer for the last time" (p. 139). But nothing in his earlier life has given him reason to hope that this will happen. As Fogle observes, "he knew as he prayed that he did not believe" (p. 139) brings to mind "'Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief'".⁵⁹ This is the only failure of understanding throughout, that "he knew that the Woman would come out presently [...] the Woman would triumph always as she triumphed now, and that he would grow ever more sickly under her [...] superior wisdom, till one day [...] the doctor would be proved right" (p. 139). It is interesting, however, that what he imagines, i.e. the woman prodding "at the straw in her clumsy impatience", is the reality of what happens. Conradin's imagination is based on what he knows of Mrs De Ropp's character, therefore it is right. When Saki says, "he knew as he prayed" this is in reality what Conradin fears. Like Nicholas he can accurately predict his guardian's movements which enable him to foresee the outcome. Again the "superior wisdom" of the adults has been found wanting as in "The Lumber-Room". The "clumsy impatience" of the woman which is to prove fatal in this instance calls to mind the less drastic consequences of similar behaviour on the part of Nicholas's aunt when she falls into the rain-water tank.

Everything hangs in the balance at this moment: total victory or total defeat, survival or extinction. But his courage does not fail him and he chants in defiance (his "threatened idol" is at risk as well as Conradin):

"Sredni Vashtar went forth,
His thoughts were red thoughts and his teeth were white.
His enemies called for peace, but he brought them death.
Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful" (p.139).

The tension mounts as the minutes pass. "They were long minutes, but they slipped by nevertheless" (p.139), a sentence which recalls Octavian's lengthy half-hour vigil in "The Penance." In contrast to his guardian Conradin has learned patience. The process that the woman has set in motion by her wilful actions is inexorably tending towards its final resolution. She is about to learn the ultimate truth, too late, that one reaps what one sows;⁶⁰ that in a world dominated by 'nature red in tooth and claw' only the fittest can survive. As he keeps his vigil, watching the starlings, those commonest of birds, "running and flying in little parties across the lawn; he counted them over and over again" (p.140). This emphasises not only the passage of time so agonisingly measured but also how ordinary everything appears while such an extraordinary, cataclysmic event is taking place. It also stresses Conradin's ability to see - unlike Mrs De Ropp he is not short-sighted.

"Hope had crept by inches into his heart" and "in his eyes that had only known the wistful patience of defeat" "a look of triumph began to blaze" (p.140).⁶¹ The "paeon of victory and devastation", begun in defiance, is now repeated "under his breath with a furtive exultation" (p.140). And out comes the ferret from the shed, "a long, low, yellow-and-brown beast, with eyes a-blink at the waning daylight, and dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat" (p.140).⁶² The moment of Sredni Vashtar's emergence from the shed parallels Conradin's

deliverance, both held captive, Sredni Vashtar in his cage in the dark, Conradin in the darkness imposed on him by the unenlightened regime of his guardian. It is already dusk before Sredni Vashtar emerges "eyes a-blink" (p.140) which underlines how dark his captivity must have been, and by analogy how perilously close to extinction Conradin was.

As Sredni Vashtar appears, Conradin "dropped on his knees" (p.140) in a prayer of gratitude. The ferret drinks at the brook, natural and instinctive behaviour, before disappearing in unhurried fashion into the bushes.⁶³ "Such was the passing of Sredni Vashtar" (p.140) has a poetic resonance that expresses the solemnity of the moment for Conradin. More than that, however, it reveals how the boy sees the ferret as it really is, acknowledging to himself that the instrument of his deliverance is an animal and not a god. It is also worth noting that Saki does not at this point say, "Such was the passing of Mrs De Ropp"; she is of less account than the beast who has killed her.

Into this mood of hallowed truth, marking the end of Mrs De Ropp's life and the beginning of Conradin's, the maid's voice intrudes, just as in "The Lumber-Room" the voice of the aunt breaks into Nicholas's thoughts (p.375). The mundane announcement of tea highlights her unawareness and ignorance of mysteries - it is a sacrilegious interruption. She asks, "'Where is the mistress?'" (she is Mrs De Ropp's creature) to which Conradin merely responds, "'She went down to the shed some time ago'" (p.140). He is completely dispassionate, as able to mask his elation as his former misery; indifferent also to the horror which is soon to greet the maid on her discovery of her mistress's body.

Conradin meanwhile "fished a toasting-fork out of the sideboard drawer" (p.140), his own master at last, and proceeds to make a piece of toast. The toasting and buttering of the bread takes

on a ritual significance and the "sometimes" at the turning point of the story is called to mind. Imperviously he listens to the "noises and silences which fell in quick spasms beyond the dining-room door," and the macabre sounds of "the shuffling tread of those who bore a heavy burden into the house" (p.140). The irony of "heavy burden" is complex. Not only does it refer to the body of his guardian but to the news that they must impart to the boy, news that will come not as a grief to him, as they think, but as confirmation of his release from the heavy burden of her life-threatening domination of him.

When the servants exclaim, "'Whoever will break it to the poor child? I couldn't for the life of me!'" (p.140) it is clear that either they are ignorant of the true nature of his relationship to Mrs De Ropp or they are as hypocritical as she was. The fact that the maid is described as "sour-faced" would suggest that she at least has done little in the past to make Conradin's life more bearable. If they genuinely feel he will be devastated then they are as blind as she was to the truth. The making of the second piece of toast is an effective way of drawing attention to the fact that they have no place in Conradin's new world, as Loganbill points out.⁶⁴

The entire story has been interpreted by Loganbill as an initiation rite in much the same way as "The Lumber-Room",⁶⁵ in this instance a dual initiation in which Conradin passes but Mrs De Ropp does not. The symbolism of the shed as the separate place where the initiation happens, the ceremonies performed, the religious significance, the key and the final eating of the toast as a breaking of a fast are all elements of traditional rites of passage, of souls in travail.

It is interesting to trace the development of the religious imagery throughout the story. Initially it is implicit in such words as "confessed" or "duty" (p.137). Mrs De Ropp is thought

of by the boy as "an unclean thing" (p.137), she issues 'commandments' "not to do this or that" and forbids the picking of fruit in the garden (just as Nicholas in "The Lumber-Room" is also banned from his 'Garden of Eden'). The shed is likened to a "cathedral" and the ferret to a god (p.137). Then there is the "hoard of small silver" (p.137) like that of Judas. The "mystic and elaborate ceremonial" is compared to the Woman's religion and direct reference is made to the House of Rimmon (p.137). Anabaptists are mentioned (p.138); and "Conradin went back to the world that he so hated" (p.139), the world of his guardian in contrast to the paradise promised by Sredni Vashtar. The words "bitter litany", "prayer" "believe", "hymn", "threatened idol" appear on page 139, and the repetition of 'eyes' and 'seeing', in particular the phrase "his eyes were rewarded" (p.140) (which is reminiscent of "the next morning his [Octavian's] eyes were gladdened" in "The Penance", p.427) are Biblical in tone and the Old Testament God of vengeance is called to mind.

The struggle between Conradin and Mrs De Ropp, a struggle between good and evil, depends on Conradin's imagination and integrity, the lack of which in Mrs De Ropp marks her out as more of an animal than the ferret who kills her. Sredni Vashtar has at least acted true to his nature, killing from instinct; Mrs De Ropp is the victim of self-delusion.⁶⁶ As Robert Drake puts it, "Conradin [...] has a degree of wisdom, a belief in the fanciful and imaginative that his guardian does not possess [...] She does not believe in the elusive, the mysterious, the exotic represented by Sredni Vashtar and the cult which Conradin has built around him - the mysterious which is essentially a part of the whole life [...] Cognizance of the very thing she scoffs at is brought upon Mrs De Ropp by the thing itself; but it is too late."⁶⁷ The irony is that the child has again shown a greater knowledge of life than the adult; just as in "The Lumber-Room" where the "older wiser and better people" were also in error.

At the end of the story, Conradin stands on the threshold of a new life and while the reader does not know that the doctor's prognosis is wrong - only time can prove that -symbolically he is cured. At last he is a whole person, master of himself, the 'reality' of Mrs De Ropp's world having been disproved, fatally for her. Conradin's integrity and imagination have triumphed over Mrs De Ropp's self-deception.

Parallels

It is not so much the theme and gruesome treatment of "Sredni Vashtar" that marks it out as different from Saki's other child versus adult stories, but the savage tone. It is a story written in deadly earnest and the almost complete lack of dialogue adds to the sombre treatment. In total there are only one hundred and twelve words of dialogue, fourteen implicit from Mrs De Ropp: "It is not good for him to be pottering down there in all weathers" (p.138); and two exchanges with Conradin: "'I thought you liked toast'" (p.138) and "'What are you keeping in that locked hutch? [...] I believe it's guinea-pigs. I'll have them all cleared away'" (p.139). Conradin says one word to Mrs De Ropp: "'Sometimes'" (p.138), then "'Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar'" (p 138), repeated (p.139), his twenty-eight word chant, and in answer to the maid's: "'Tea is ready [...] Where is the mistress?'" (p.140), "'She went down to the shed some time ago'" (p.140). Then in the last paragraph there is the fifteen word exclamation. This lack of verbal communication enhances the sense of the very confined world which Conradin endures with its "coddling restrictions" together with his extreme self-containment.

Compared to this the lighter stories are characterised by dialogue, often witty or humorous; "The Story-Teller", "The Toys of Peace", "Hyacinth", "Morlvera", all depending in large measure for their satirical effect and the impetus of the

narrative on verbal exchanges. Nicholas in "The Lumber-Room" uses words to good effect but never to excess in his dialogues with the aunt whose muddled thinking is revealed by her utterances; but a great part of the story is narration. The same is true of "The Penance" where the inscrutability of the children and the impotence of Octavian in his attempts to break down the barrier are stressed in the paucity of the dialogue which is concentrated towards the end of the story as understanding is reached. Generally it seems that the higher the proportion of dialogue to narration, the lighter the tone or more comic the effect - and conversely.

In "The Toys of Peace" the dialogue between Harvey and the children, where they keep asking questions which he finds difficulty in answering, is similar to the plight of the aunt in "The Story-Teller". It is a common factor in "The Lumber-Room" and "Morlvera" also where uncomfortable questions or unanswerable objections are countered by attempts to change the subject to distract the children from their relentless pursuit of what they perceive to be inconsistencies.

Harvey is well-meaning but weak; his initial reaction to his sister's suggestion: "'the idea is certainly an interesting and very well-meaning one [...] whether it would succeed well in practice-'" (p.394) showing his lack of conviction. Most of his remarks in fact reveal a prosaic mind. His statements are bald and factual: "'Here is a model of a municipal wash-house'", "'Here are some tools of industry'" (p.395) and so on, while the children say, "'We'll give him a purple coat'" and "'we must pretend that they have thousands of men'" (p.397), thereby showing their powers of imagination.

In "Sredni Vashtar" there is the effect of Mrs De Ropp muttering to herself: "'It is not good for him to be pottering down there in all weathers'" (p.138) and in "The Lumber-Room": "It was

clear to his aunt that he was determined to get into the gooseberry garden 'only,' as she remarked to herself, 'because I have told him he is not to' " (p.373). In "The Penance" and "Sredni Vashtar", the adults' attempts to propitiate the children are met with the same stony response.

It is through speech also that the "inexorable child-logic" becomes evident. Hyacinth retorts when reprimanded for hitting Jacky Gaffin who was "only half French", "it was only the French half of Jacky that he had been hitting" (p.519) and again when he is reproached for leaving "'those poor little children there alone in the pigsty'", "'They're not alone, they've got ten little pigs in with them'" (p.520). In "The Lumber-Room", Nicholas is proved right about the frog in his bread-and-milk: "'You said there couldn't possibly be a frog in my bread-and-milk; there was a frog in my bread-and-milk'" (p.372) and in his dialogue with the aunt in the rain-water tank. Harvey Bope in "The Toys of Peace" says, "'Votes are put into it at election times'", which elicits the inevitable question, "'What is put into it at other times?'" (p.395). "The Penance" affords several instances. "'You killed our little cat'", "'we shall be very sorry when we've killed Olivia [...] but we can't be sorry till we've done it '", "'no one helped our cat'" (p.426). And in "The Story-Teller" when the aunt feebly says that the sheep are being driven out of one field and into another because there is more grass in it, the children object, "'But there is lots of grass in that field [...] there's nothing else but grass there'" (p.349); and at the end of the boring moral tale where the little girl is rescued from the bull because she was good, "'Wouldn't they have saved her if she hadn't been good?'" (p.350) which "was exactly the question that the bachelor had wanted to ask" (p.350).

The ability of children to judge dispassionately is another common feature in these stories - overtly in "The Penance" with

judicial imagery throughout. In "Morlvera" the cockney children are in the role of witnesses and judge accordingly - Bertha "was doubtless as fat and foolish as [Victor] had described her to be" (p.493). The children in "The Story-Teller" judge that another Bertha deserves her fate and in "Sredni Vashtar" Mrs De Ropp has reaped what she sowed leaving Conradin unmoved. Hyacinth is willing to sacrifice the Jutterly children but is equally prompt to release them when he perceives justice has been done and in "The Lumber-Room" Nicholas walks away from his aunt's predicament, judging correctly that she has brought it on herself. In "The Toys of Peace" the children judge the toys to be useless in their present form and adapt them to suit their purposes.

In each story the punishment fits the crime - in "Sredni Vashtar" at one end of the scale, Mrs De Ropp actually forfeits her life. The aunt in "The Lumber-Room" suffers mortification which she richly deserves and Octavian loses face but gains favour. The aunt in "The Story-Teller" metaphorically digs her own grave at the end of the story by saying disapprovingly, "'a most improper story'" (p.354), thereby guaranteeing her future embarrassment. At the end of "Hyacinth" the adults who did not heed the warning signs deserve no better than is meted out to them and in "The Toys of Peace" the end is a foregone conclusion to anyone with imagination or common sense. In "Morlvera", in the story within a story, Emmeline justifies the doll's destruction by Victor in saying, "'I've bin finking. Do you know oo 'e was? 'E was 'er little boy wot she'd sent away to live wiv poor folks. 'E come back and done that'" (p.495).

The religious imagery which "The Penance", "The Lumber-Room" and "Sredni Vashtar" have in common has already been noted but there are other common factors too. A knowledge of history is referred to in "The Toys of Peace", "Hyacinth" and "The Penance", and political issues are touched on in "The Toys of

Peace " and "Hyacinth". The savagery of animals, the ferret in "Sredni Vashtar" being the prime example, is a recurrent theme. In "The Lumber-Room" and "The Story-Teller", there are wolves, while pigs feature in "The Penance", "Hyacinth" and "The Story-Teller". Bloodthirsty children appear throughout, while the 'refined' adults in Saki's stories attempt to draw a veil over the relish with which children enjoy gruesome stories, as in "The Story-Teller", or even playing with toy soldiers as in "The Toys of Peace".

The children triumph because they know what is real and show up the adults for the posturing fools that they are. The ghoulish delight of "The Penance", and Nicholas's bloodthirsty contemplation of the tapestry are unfeigned; Emmeline and Bert give a hoarse cheer when the sinister Morlvera is destroyed, Conradin eats another piece of toast when Mrs De Ropp's body is carried into the house. This seeming callousness is in fact a portrayal of pure honesty. Unlike the adults they are able to admit to themselves the true nature of their feelings - they act naturally and with an integrity which the adults lack; but they are also able when necessary to disguise their feelings. Hyacinth says, "'Liar!'" (p.522) without equivocation and acts with diabolical ruthlessness, though he has been able to look like a perfect angel. The adults on the other hand are hypocritical, with a set of false values, which are nevertheless transparent to the children's all-seeing eyes. The children in every case demonstrate their ability to see beneath the superficial behaviour of the "older, wiser and better people" (p.372) to the underlying motives. Their clear-sightedness and "inexorable child-logic" leave the adults with their follies and hypocrisies exposed.

NOTES

1 Robert Drake, "The Sauce for the Asparagus", *The Saturday Book*, 20 (1960), 68.

2 Reginald also touches on this in "Reginald's Drama": "And of course one would have to work in studies of the struggle of hereditary tendency against environment" (p.30).

3 John Letts in his "Introduction", *Saki: Short Stories* (London: Folio Society, 1976), p.11, says, "One of Saki's most frequently used weapons was inversion. This is seen at its best in "The Story-Teller".

4 This calls to mind the ghoulish child in "The Penance" saying, "'Frow her down and the pigs will d'vour her, every bit 'cept the palms of her hands'" (p.425).

5 Alexander Porterfield in "Saki", *London Mercury*, 12 (August 1925), 388, says of "The Story-Teller": "the keynote of the story, of all his stories - that blithe negation of the dull and laudable, that quiet derision of pretentiousness and cant."

6 Likened by W.D. Copley in "The Tales of Saki", *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club*, 47 (1921), 231, to "The Monkey's Paw" by W.W. Jacobs, though Copley refers to "Shredni Vashtar".

7 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Dent, 1990), p.33. At birth the mind is "white paper, void of all characters".

8 Hector Hugh Munro himself and his brother and sister.

9 Dean Loganbill, 'Saki: A Literary and Critical Study' (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1973), p.85.

10 It could be another oblique reference to his Aunt Augusta.

11 Op. cit., p.86.

12 "Furtive" is a favourite word throughout the stories.

13 It is perhaps worth noting how often the word "three" or "triple" crops up throughout the story. Reference is made to "three heads", "three white set faces", "threefold study", "triple gaze", "three throats" (p.423); "three children", "three unsparing judges", "three small wardens" (p.424); "three solemn nods", "three children", "three chubby arms" (p.425); "three throats", "three children" (p.426); "threefold solemnity" and "three pairs of solemn eyes" (p.427), no fewer than fifteen references. As Brewer (*Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*) says, "three according to Pythagoras was 'the perfect number, expressive of beginning, middle and end', wherefore he makes it a symbol of Deity". There are certainly many instances in mythology of the threefold nature of deity: the Fates or Parcae Sisters, the Barpies, the Furies, The Graces both pagan and Christian (i.e. Faith, Hope and Charity, the three Cardinal Virtues). As Brewer points out, "A Trinity is by no means

confined to the Christian creed" and this confusion of pagan and Christian is illustrated throughout "The Penance". The use of religious symbolism together with the reversal of child and adult roles serves to show the errors of perception made by Octavian and the means by which he is brought face to face with the truth.

14 "A wall of ice had grown up gradually between mother and son, a barrier across which they could hold converse, but which gave a wintry chill even to the sparkle of their lightest words." *The Unbearable Bassington*, p.589. This is like "the high blank wall" in "The Penance".

15 In "The Story-Teller" the children approve when they hear that "the gardeners had told the Prince that you couldn't have pigs and flowers, so he decided to have pigs and no flowers" (p.352). There is nothing sentimental about Saki's children.

16 In "The Toys of Peace", pp.393-98, children's familiarity with the bloodthirsty elements of history is likewise celebrated.

17 A reference to II Kings ix.35: "and they went to bury her [Jezebel]: but they found no more of her than the skull, and her feet, and the palms of her hands".

18 "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand" (Exodus xxi.23).

19 This standard of measurement recalls the early "Reginald" sketches: "Reginald on Christmas Presents", "There is my Aunt Agatha [...] who sent me a pair of gloves [...] But - *they were nines!*" (p.9). The same glove-sizing metaphor occurs in "The Innocence of Reginald", "Miriam takes nines in voices" (p.39), and also "The Schartz-Metterklume Method", "a number nine spanking" (p.286).

20 It is worth noting that the form of the penance calls to mind "brute beasts that have no understanding" (from the Book of Common Prayer) and "I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart" (from II Esdras iii.10).

21 According to Brewer, a reference to "the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, [who] humbled himself to Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) by standing for three days barefooted in the courtyard of the palace in the garb of a penitent (January 1077)".

22 That is, a light-weight shirt of the sort worn by athletes.

23 James George Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1923), pp.322-37.

24 Robert Drake, "The Sauce for the Asparagus", describes Octavian as "a dignified gentleman of middle age" who is threatened by the children "into standing for an hour in his shirt with a candle in his hand over the grave of their cat [...] Their 'inexorable child-logic' provides a perfect contrast to Octavian's superficial 'adult' dignity" (p.68). There seem to be several inaccuracies here. There is nothing in the text to suggest that Octavian is either middle-aged or particularly middle-aged; he is "lively", "cheerful", and he desires "the unstinted approval of his fellows" (p.422). Nor does he do penance for an hour: "half an hour seemed long and goodly in their eyes" (p.427).

25 In the words of Matthew xviii.2-3, "Except that ye become as little children ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." There is perhaps also an echo of Psalms xviii.28-29, "For thou wilt light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness. For by thee have I run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall."

26 MacQueen Pope, *Back Numbers* (London: Hutchinson, 1954), p.57: "There it was - before him. The heaps of treasure, all the lumber, the throw-outs, the discards which made a Victorian Box Room one of the most delectable places in the world - a place of Magic. Some folks called it the Lumber Room, in this house it was always the Box Room".

27 Don Henry Otto in 'The Development of Method and Meaning in the Fiction of Saki' (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of S. California, 1969), pp.105-32, discusses the role of the "juvenile protagonist" seeking to subvert "conventional society".

28 "Saki: Some Problems and a Bibliography", *English Fiction in Transition*, 5 (September 1962), 9.

29 Miriam Quen Cheikin, "Saki: Practical Jokes as a Clue to Comedy", *English Literature in Transition*, 21 (1978), 123: "Running through the stories are the other essentials of comedy, including the unexpected, the incongruous, and the action that breaks the rules of decorum".

30 Porterfield, "Saki", states: "this is just the way a child would feel in such circumstances; and it is in all such similar passages that Saki is at his best" (p.390).

31 It is part of Saki's technique to intersperse his descriptive passages with short summary sentences to highlight a point.

32 Stating by indirection is another trick to involve the reader by allowing him to draw his own conclusions.

33 John Letts, "Introduction", p.14, says of "The Lumber-Room", "the aunt is forced to plead for release with a relentless Nicholas [...who] condemns her to a just and sodden hour or two in the rain-water tank" (p.14). Not only is the time factor inaccurate but the aunt says, "'luckily there's no water'" (p.376) in the tank. Such errors are a pity because they inevitably raise doubts about the accuracy of other observations in an otherwise shrewd explication.

34 This echoes the phrase "his eyes were rewarded" (p.140) in "Sredni Vashtar" and "his eyes were gladdened" in "The Penance" (p.427).

35 Drake, "The Sauce for the Asparagus", p.68.

36 "Introduction", p.11.

37 J.W. Lambert, in "Jungle Boy in the Drawing Room", *Listener*, 9 January 1956, p.211, says: "unsuitable guardians are a frequent target in his stories."

38 In the words of S.P.B. Mais, "A Great Humourist", *Bookman*, 56 (April 1919), 20: "Munro's understanding of children can only be explained by the fact that he was in many ways a child himself [...] Manhood has but placed in his hands a perfect sense of irony and withheld all other adult traits".

39 Loganbill, *op.cit.*, pp.155-163.

40 Philip Stevick, "Saki's Beasts", *English Literature in Transition*, 9 (September 1966), 33-37.

41 Loganbill, pp.55-66, discusses the 'Doppelganger' in Saki's stories.

42 Elizabeth Drew, "Saki", *Atlantic Monthly*, 166 (1940), 98, says, "To talk about Saki's 'characterization' is absurd. His characters are constructed to form a front against which his light satiric artillery can most effectively be deployed." This is certainly true of his practical jokes or Reginald sketches, but it is disappointing to find such a perceptive critic unwilling to point out such obvious exceptions to this rule as "The Lumber-Room".

43 In "Saki", *London Mercury* (1925), 389: "It is with children especially, in fact, that he is at his best, not because they talk or act like children in his stories, since they do not particularly, but because they *think*, they re-act, like children. It is in their own imaginative world we move".

44 Peter Bilton, 'Saki and his stories' (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Oslo, 1959), p.7.

45 Ethel Munro in her biography of Saki in *The Square Egg* (London: Viking Press, 1926), p.7, says, "But the character of the aunt in 'The Lumber-Room' is Aunt Augusta to the life". Hector and his brother and sister, like many children of that class and that period, were brought up by aunts.

46 "Introduction", p.13, "one must go back to one of his classic stories of childhood, 'The Lumber-Room'".

47 Brian Inglis, "The Lumber-Room", *Spectator*, 147 (1956), 907. "Nobody can touch Saki as a conveyor of the fearful joys of overturning taboos; of breaking into forbidden rooms". "Even when Saki's children are fiends [...] they are preferable to the grown-ups: always we are on their side against cousin, guardian and aunt."

48 Porterfield, "Saki", p.390.

49 Elizabeth Drew, "Saki", p.96.

50 V.S. Pritchett, "The Performing Lynx", *New Statesman and Nation*, 53 (1957), 18.

51 R. Ellis Roberts, "Saki", *New Statesman*, 24 July 1926, pp.416-17. This is an interesting if somewhat contradictory discussion of Saki's 'cruelty'. In likening him to Kipling, Roberts says, "There is no story of Kipling's, not even 'The End of the Passage', which makes one doubt the author's sanity, common sense and capacity to decide on the right side. There is scarcely a grim story of Saki's which does not fill one with apprehensions for the author's balance" (p.416). Compare this to "many of his stories are stories with the same lust which invigorates 'Sredni Vashtar'. His soul was not quite sane; and his insanity is the more horrible because of his obvious sanity of mind, and his known sanity of body" (p.417).

52 Graham Greene, "The Burden of Childhood," *Collected Essays* (London: Bodley Head, 1969), pp.128-29. Ethel may have been justified in thinking that Greene's judgement is facile, since he says: "Munro was not himself beaten, Augusta preferred his younger brother for that exercise" (p.128). Saki was in fact the youngest of the three children.

53 Richard Harter Fogle, "Saki and Wodehouse", *The English Short Story 1880-1945: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne, 1985), p.95.

54 "'I have the doctor's permission to live till Tuesday,' said Laura" (p.241). "As a matter of fact Laura died on Monday" (p.243).

55 In "The Penance", for instance, the children are described thus: "a threefold study of cold human hate [...] raging yet masked in stillness" (p.423).

56 Thomas Bewick, the famous early nineteenth century naturalist, is quoted in Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.25: "According to Bewick, the weasel was 'wild and untractable', dedicated to 'rapine and cruelty' and displayed 'a natural attachment to everything that is corrupt.'" Since the weasel and ferret are closely related members of the *Mustela* family the same characteristics may be noted in the ferret.

57 Robert Drake, "Saki's Ironic Stories," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 5 (1963), 383. Drake has also noted this view of a separate compartment likened to the imagination, but he sees the unused tool-shed as the parallel: "Corresponding to the compartment of his mind - the imagination - from which he can shut out Mrs De Ropp and the 'three-fifths of the world which are necessary and disagreeable and real' is the unused tool shed in the garden".

58 This recalls the "three white set faces [...] looking down at him" in "The Penance" (p.423).

59 Fogle, "Saki and Wodehouse", p.95: "The probability of a different conclusion is glanced at with a blasphemous echoing of 'Lord, I believe'".

60 Loganbill makes this same observation, p.98.

61 An echo perhaps of the wolf's "pale grey eyes gleaming with ferocity and triumph" in "The Story-Teller" (p.353).

62 Maria Katrakis, 'The Satiric Art of H.H. Munro (Saki)' (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of South Africa, 1979), pp.69-70, draws attention to the lack of mention of blood.

63 The slaking of thirst and the "dark wet stains" are more macabre than any mention of blood would have been, as Katrakis points out. They also help to stress Conradin's detachment.

64 Loganbill, p.191.

65 Ibid., pp.181-91.

66 This is reminiscent of "Beast" and "Un-Beast", the children's definition of Octavian in "The Penance", pp.422, 427 respectively.

67 "Saki's Ironic Stories", p.385.

Chapter 3

"THE DOMAIN OF MIRACLE"

Saki's children often leave the adults in disarray. Equally disconcerting to the unwitting or overbearing adult is the role of the supernatural in Saki's stories and it is almost certain that his frequent use of this device is because he actively enjoyed writing about it. It might well have had the effect of immediately transporting him, as it does the reader, to a fantastical, legendary world in which to be eternally young and mischievous, and free from the censorious limitations of an adult-dominated life, is perfectly and perpetually possible.

Before discussing Saki's use of the supernatural or indeed identifying those stories in that category it may be useful to consider the role of the supernatural in the literature of the day. From earliest times, ghosts, magic and creatures with uncanny powers have permeated folk literature and legends. To the traditional elements of horror and fantasy in folklore, or in the Gothic romances so popular in the early part of the nineteenth century,¹ was added, in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, a new interest in scientific knowledge - of the animal kingdom, of anatomy and medical research, and of mechanical invention. In Saki's day the current vogue for realism as applied to the grotesque or uncanny was greatly enhanced by the use of scientific detail to lend a bogus authenticity.

Darwin's theory of evolution had radically challenged religious beliefs and shocked man into a new awareness of the fundamental laws of nature. From this there developed an interest in the workings of the human mind and the formation of such bodies as The Society for Psychical Research, psychical and psychological being virtually interchangeable terms at the time. Not only was man pushing back the frontiers of the mind, at the same time he

was making rapid and dramatic strides in the area of scientific discovery. The Eighteen Seventies, for instance, saw the earliest recorded experiments in telepathy, conducted in 1871 by Henry Sidgwick, and the first telephone exhibited in 1876 at the Philadelphia Exhibition - an illustration of the divergent forms which scientific experiment was taking. Within the next two decades the petrol engine was invented and the history of aviation was in its infancy, 1903 bringing the first flight by the Wright brothers and 1909 the first channel crossing by Bleriot. Not only was the world becoming smaller and more accessible because of the development of communications, but a new quest for truth and understanding was all pervasive.

The range of material called into play in the supernatural fiction of the day was enormous: Mary Shelley's man-made monster in *Frankenstein* (1818); the chemical experiments leading to the dual personality in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886); H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* with its grafting of human traits on to animals and its anti-vivisectionist propaganda; his futuristic space adventures - for instance, *The War of the Worlds* (1898) about Martian invasion. To this may be added, among many others too numerous to mention, Conan Doyle's interest in Spiritualism and his tales of the supernatural, in particular *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902);² the fairy lore of Wilde and Barrie and Andrew Lang; Pan in Kipling and Barrie and others;³ Hardy's recurrent interest in witchcraft and folklore and Hawthorne's frequent use of psychic research. In fact the eminence and varied professions of members of The Society for Psychical research as listed by Hynes in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* illustrate the extent of such interest.⁴ The climate then was right for the fiction writer to exploit the extensive range of supernatural themes at his disposal, and the possibilities for a writer of Saki's imagination would be almost boundless. Against this background

then it is perhaps surprising that he should have limited himself in his use of the supernatural; including merely witchcraft, ghosts, Pan, talking animals, metempsychosis, werewolves, second sight, the pathetic fallacy and Hell. (Fleeting reference to mesmerism is made in "The She-Wolf" and "The Seventh Pullet").

In identifying Saki's short stories of the supernatural a useful list is given in *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction*.⁵ Most of the stories listed will be dealt with individually later in this chapter, with the additions and deletions as listed in footnote 5. What is noteworthy then is how Saki has chosen to limit his range. The clue to why he has done so may be found in the stories themselves and in particular in one sentence in "The Peace of Mowsle Barton" (p.189): "When once you have taken the Impossible into your calculations its possibilities become practically limitless", or in other words, if applied to story-telling, the employment of the supernatural is another device (like the superior wisdom of the child, or the practical joke) to shock his characters into awareness of vices and hypocrisies or bring enlightenment in some way. As Dorothy Scarborough puts it: "Satiric supernaturalism is employed to drive home many truths, to puncture conceits of all kinds".⁶

Figures in a landscape

Of the eighteen stories in the supernatural category⁷ exactly half are set in the countryside: five of them on a farm, two of them in rural retreats and the remaining two somewhere in the wilds of eastern Europe. Common to all of them is the feeling of a "savage wildness"⁸ (p.161) that underlies the calm surface order of things, the feeling of a brooding fate that is not to be denied, and the sense of man's insignificance and the brief span of his allotted time against the timelessness of Nature.

The headstrong woman (like the aunt in "The Lumber-Room" and the cousin in "Sredni Vashtar") and the feeble man (like Octavian Ruttie in "The Penance") again figure in these tales, and it may be convenient to divide these rural stories of the supernatural into those which feature the wilfully blind or domineering and the weak-willed or unsuspecting. Notable in the former category are "The Music on the Hill" and "The Holy War" where arrogance is punished by death; "The Interlopers" and "The Wolves of Cernogratz", set in the wilds of Eastern Europe, where wilful blindness is rewarded in the one case by death and in the other by extreme discomfiture; and "The Cobweb" in which tragedy strikes a young couple who have inherited a farm and in seeking to impose their modern ways are as carelessly dispossessed.

The second group (that is, the gullible or weak-willed) comprises "Gabriel-Ernest", the story of a were-wolf, in which the unimaginative and unthinking Van Cheele much resembles Octavian Ruttie; "The Peace of Mowsle Barton", a story of witchcraft which causes Crefton Lockyer to flee headlong from the less-than-peaceful countryside; "The Hounds of Fate", in which Martin Stoner through his sloth and lack of foresight incurs the fate of the man whom he is impersonating; and "The Pond", in which Mona who seems destined for a tragic end receives a last minute reprieve. As Otto expresses it,⁹ the Nietzschean concept of the "unwomanly woman" and the "unmanly man" is once more a strong factor in each of these stories, and, as a general rule, the more unwomanly or domineering the woman and the more unheroic the man, the more severe the fate incurred.

In "The Holy War",¹⁰ the most extreme example of this abhorrently domineering type is portrayed by Thirza Yealmton, of whose character an early warning is given: "Thirza Yealmton was what is known as a managing woman" (L.p.288). True to type, she interferes where interference is unnecessary, informing her

husband, Bevil Yealmton,¹¹ on his return from a two-year sojourn in "Asiatic Russia" (L.p.287) to take possession of a property which he has loved since childhood, that "'you will find a lot of improvements since you last saw the place'" (L.p.289). "It had never crossed his mind that any improvement could be desirable in the wonderland that he remembered" (L.p.289), but Thirza is oblivious of this as she itemises the changes she has made: in draining the pond because "'it made things damp and looked untidy'" (L.p.289); in getting rid of the "strutting, gorgon-hued game fowl" (L.p.289) for "a monotonous colony of white Leghorns" (L.p.289) which lay well. Obsessed as she is with practical issues and as insensitive as she is mercenary, she "did not see the look that came into his eyes" (L. p.289). She is, however, "chilled and offended" (L.p.290) by his tone as he points out "'we are not poor'" (L.p.290) when confronted by the "serried rows" (L.p.289) of fruit trees which have replaced the orchard he had loved and which was a favourite nesting place for goldfinches. Not in the least contrite, she "promptly decided on a four days' headache" (L.p.290) in self-righteous response to his further displeasure.

His patience is finally exhausted when he learns that Thirza has authorised the shooting of the wood owls because she thinks they make "'such a dismal noise'" (L.p.291), a view which could not be further from the almost mystical feeling that Bevil has for them: "'All the way across Europe I've been longing to hear those owls singing Vespers'" (L.p.290). The vehemence of his reaction is akin to that of Conradin when Mrs De Ropp gets rid of his pet hen. "'Is there any other vile thing that you have done in this dear old place?'" Bevil asks (L.p.291), adding prophetically, "'Something dreadful must surely happen to you!'" (L.p.291).¹² Significantly, Thirza is more deeply offended than ever but still convinced of the rectitude of her actions, each piece of dialogue illustrating the ever-widening gulf between her and Bevil.

He does his best to restore things to their former perfection and "while these things were being done Yealnton and his wife waged a politely reticent warfare [...] a struggle which Thirza knew she must ultimately win, because she was fighting for existence". "What she did not know, or did not understand, was that Yealnton was fighting a Holy War, and therefore could not be defeated" (L.p.291). Clearly then this is a fight to the death. This wilful blindness on her part leads inexorably to the day when she decides to prevent the children from skating on the pond: "'They've been warned not to go on the ice, and I mean to see that they don't'" (L.p.292), the tone of this again reminiscent of Mrs De Ropp when she says of Conradin: "'it is not good for him to be pottering down there in all weathers'" (p.138). In so doing she is attacked by a wounded wild swan and falls through the ice to her death, a fate very similar to the Sheep in the story of that name and befalling a similarly foolish and stubborn character.¹³

The theme of this story is the sacrilegious behaviour of Thirza whose "arranging and interfering and supervising were a necessary condition of her well-being" (L.p.291), and while the supernatural element is less explicit than in some of the other tales, there is the sense of a powerful force at work. The manner of her death happening at the same moment as Bevil's "involuntary prophecy: [...] 'Something dreadful must surely happen to you'" (L.p.292) recalls Conradin watching the shed door and invoking his prayer again.¹⁴ It is fitting that it should be a bird that is the cause of her death since the sacrificing of birds has figured so largely in the improvements she has made, and doubly ironic that the bird "wounded by some gunner [...] and harbouring among the reeds till it should die" has "strength enough left to do - what it had done" (L.p.292). In this respect it is like the stag in "The Music on the Hill" which kills Sylvia but is itself doomed.

In Sylvia's case it is the wilful disregard of Pan which is the cause of her downfall. Sylvia Seltoun who, "notwithstanding her name, was accustomed to nothing much more sylvan than 'leafy Kensington'" (p.161) and is "scarcely pugnacious by temperament, but belonged to that more successful class of fighters who are pugnacious by circumstance" (p.161) has "brought her hardest and certainly her most important struggle to a successful issue" (p.161). This victory is in marrying "'Dead Mortimer' [...]" in the teeth of the cold hostility of his family, and in spite of his unaffected indifference to women" (p.161). There are clearly several good reasons why 'Dead Mortimer' is not a good choice of husband, but her determination to have her own way has blinded her to everything but her ambition to marry him.

Added to this is her desire to prise him away from London despite his mother's cryptic and paradoxical warning: "'You will never get Mortimer to go [...] but if he once goes he'll stay; Yessney throws almost as much a spell over him as Town does'" (p.161). The spell that London casts over him giving rise to "'the Jermyn-Street-look' in his eyes" (p.161) is very different from the spell cast by Yessney, and it is not long before even the insensitive Sylvia is moved to remark to her husband, "'One could almost think that in such a place the worship of Pan had never quite died out'" (p.162), to which Mortimer replies, "'The worship of Pan never has died out'" (p.162). Like Mrs De Ropp, "Sylvia was religious in an honest, vaguely devotional kind of way" (p.162)¹⁵ and her response is predictable. "'You don't really believe in Pan?'" (p.162). Mortimer warns her quietly, "'I've been a fool in most things [...] but I'm not such a fool as not to believe in Pan when I'm down here. And if you're wise you won't disbelieve in him too boastfully while you're in his country'" (p.162). The warning note is struck just as in "The Holy War" when Thirza should have taken note of Bevil's displeasure and modified her behaviour but, like Thirza, Sylvia can only see her own point of view. Despite the "sense of

furtive watchful hostility" (p.162), the restless and hostile behaviour of the animals, her feeling "that if she had come across any human beings in this wilderness of barn and byre they would have fled wraith-like from her gaze" (p.163) and "the echo of a boy's laughter, golden and equivocal" (p.163) when there is no presence to account for it, she is scornful of Mortimer's warnings.

When she comes upon "a stone pedestal surmounted by a small bronze figure of a youthful Pan" (p.163), she feels "contemptuous annoyance" (p.163) on seeing the tribute of grapes which "were none too plentiful at the manor house" (p.163). As with Thirza this mercenary attitude clouds her judgement. As she snatches up the grapes she is startled by a "sudden apparition" (p.163) of a "boy's face [...] scowling at her, brown and beautiful, with unutterably evil eyes" (p.163) - a vision which is remarkably like the werewolf-boy in "Gabriel-Ernest" - and drops the grapes as she flees.

Her manner in discussing the incident with Mortimer later is arrogant and dismissive, while he is uncommunicative and detached, again the dialogue shedding light on the divergence between husband and wife as in "The Holy War". She supposes the boy was "'a gipsy lad'" (p.164) to which Mortimer replies, "'A reasonable theory [...] only there aren't any gipsies in these parts at present'" (p.164). Her reaction to the votive offering of grapes is very revealing, showing how concerned she is with appearances and how in her arrogance she has still completely failed to heed all these sinister warnings. "'I suppose it was your doing [...] it's a harmless piece of lunacy, but people would think you dreadfully silly if they knew of it'" (p.164). Mortimer's interest is sharpened immediately: "'Did you meddle with it in any way?'" (p.164) and his response: "'I don't think you were wise to do that [...] I've heard it said that the Wood Gods are rather horrible to those who molest them'" (p.164)¹⁶ is

chilling in the same way as Bevil's remark to Thirza: "'Is there any other vile thing you have done?'" (L.p.291).

Sylvia remains defiant, however: "'Horrible perhaps to those that believe in them, but you see I don't'" (p.164). And this is her downfall, this smug arrogance and wilful blindness. Mortimer warns her to "'avoid the woods and orchards [...] and give a wide berth to the horned beasts on the farm'" (p.164) and even though she considers "it was all nonsense, of course [...]" in that lonely wood-girt spot nonsense seemed able to rear a bastard brood of uneasiness" (p.164). This makes her say, "'I think we will go back to Town some time soon'" (p.164), a decision which reveals that "her victory had not been so complete as she had supposed; it had carried her on to ground that she was already anxious to quit" (p.164), in which respect she closely resembles Crefton Lockyer in "The Peace of Mowsle Barton". But it is already too late for her as Mortimer with his superior knowledge predicts: "'I don't think you will ever go back to Town'" (p.164), a note which resembles Bevil's warning, "'Something dreadful must surely happen to you'" (L.p.291). While "he seemed to be paraphrasing his mother's prediction as to himself" (p.164) the sinister undertone is obvious.

On her walk next day Sylvia notes "with dissatisfaction and some self-contempt" (p.164) that she is taking Mortimer's advice and avoiding the woods and horned beasts. The animals are restive and "a low, fitful piping, as of some reedy flute, was coming from the depth of a neighbouring copse, and there seemed to be some subtle connection between the animal's restless pacing and the wild music from the wood" (p.165). She becomes aware of a stag being chased by hounds, which, instead of making for "the red deer's favoured sanctuary, the sea [...]" turned his head to the upland slope and came lumbering resolutely onward over the heather" (p.165).

Sylvia thinks, "'It will be dreadful [...] the hounds will pull him down under my very eyes'" but the "music of the pack seemed to have died away [...] and in its place she heard again that wild piping [...] as though urging the failing stag to a final effort" (p.165). The irony is plain to see, only Sylvia being unaware of what the final effort is to be. "The pipe music shrilled suddenly around her" and "in an instant her pity for the hunted animal was changed to wild terror at her own danger" (p.165). At last "in a flash of numbing fear" (p.165) she remembers Mortimer's warning about the horned beasts and realises that the Pan pipes are luring the stag towards her. Her fear changes to "a quick throb of joy [when] she saw that she was not alone" (pp.165-66), but this is the final irony since it is the figure of Pan himself whom she perceives at the moment of death when "the acrid smell of the hunted animal was in her nostrils" (p.166), the hunted animal referring both to the stag and to Sylvia herself. And "her eyes were filled with the horror of something she saw other than her oncoming death" (p.166) - the ultimate truth that the Wood Gods do exist, that Pan is real and that as ever 'God is not mocked'. Like Mrs De Ropp, Thirza Yealnton and the rest she has paid the ultimate penalty for this hubris and Pan has exacted his tribute.¹⁷

This same ironical moment of truth is implicit also in the ending of "The Interlopers", the story of a senseless feud set "somewhere on the eastern spurs of the Carpathians" (p.447), when after three generations of enmity which had turned a "neighbour feud [...] into a personal one since Ulrich [von Gradwitz] had come to be head of his family" (p.447), he finally confronts his sworn enemy, "Georg Znaeym, the inheritor of the quarrel" (p.447). Their fault lies not so much in the feud itself which "might, perhaps, have died down or been compromised if the personal ill-will of the two men had not stood in the way" (p.477), as in this element of petty malice. "As boys they had thirsted for one another's blood" (p.477) which may be

understandable at that age but "as men each prayed that misfortune might fall on the other" (p.477).

This prayer is answered unexpectedly and with fitting irony in the moment of the first and only meeting of the two men. Ulrich in patrolling the forest has been separated from his men. "If only on this wild night, in this dark, lone spot, he might come across Georg Znaeum, man to man, with none to witness - that was the wish that was uppermost in his thoughts" (p.448). His unspoken wish is granted in the instant. But at the moment of confrontation an unexpected problem arises: "a man who has been brought up under the code of a restraining civilization cannot easily nerve himself to shoot down his neighbour in cold blood and without word spoken" (p.448). The failure to anticipate this difficulty shows a fatal lack of perception and in this "moment of hesitation [...] a deed of Nature's own violence overwhelmed them both" (p.448). Before they can take evasive action "a mass of falling beech tree had thundered down on them" (p.448),¹⁸ Nature replying with swift and sure irony and with even-handed dispassion to each man's prayer for evil to befall the other.

Ulrich is both glad to be alive and exasperated at being trapped and gives tongue to both emotions, which evokes a childish, gibing response from Georg: "'So you're not killed, as you ought to be [...] Ho, what a jest, Ulrich von Gradwitz snared in his stolen forest'" (p.449). Ulrich, equally childish, retorts, "'I'm caught in my own forest-land [...] When my men come to release us you will wish [...] you were in a better plight than caught poaching on a neighbour's land'" (p.449), the whole tenor of the dialogue throughout encapsulating the petty childishness of the feud. The taunting continues back and forth while Ulrich frees his arm sufficiently to reach his wine-flask and having drunk some of the "Heaven-sent draught" (p.450) (an ironic observation since his present predicament may be said to be

"Heaven-sent" while his own forethought has provided the flask) is moved by "something like a throb of pity [for] his enemy [...] just keeping the groans of pain and weariness from crossing his lips" (p.450).

He offers his flask to Georg, saying, "'One may as well be as comfortable as one can. Let us drink, even if tonight one of us dies'" (p.450). Already he has shown a sense of pity and philosophical acceptance, an acknowledgement that Georg is a man as well as an enemy; but initially Georg rejects the overture with the defiant assertion, "'I don't drink wine with an enemy'" (p.450) though perhaps it is equally because he "'can scarcely see anything; there is so much blood caked round my eyes'" (p.450). But in "the pain and languor that Ulrich himself was feeling the old fierce hatred seemed to be dying down" (p.450) and he continues, "'Lying here, tonight, thinking'" (which is something that clearly it has taken this extremity to bring about) "'I've come to think we've been rather fools; there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute'" (p.450). Considering that this has been his sole purpose in life this is a major admission. He proposes, "'Neighbour, if you will help me to bury the old quarrel I - I will ask you to be my friend'" (p.450).

This child-like offer is met with a similarly immature response from Georg: "'How the whole region would stare and gabble if we rode into the market-square together'" (p.450). That is his first thought, followed immediately by the more important one: "'If we choose to make peace among our people there is none other to interfere, no interlopers from outside'" (p.450). The advantages are occurring to him thick and fast as he contemplates the social implications: "'You would come and keep the Sylvester night beneath my roof, and I would come and feast on some high day at your castle'" (p.450), revealing a mind that is only concerned with superficial things. Just as Ulrich has

ignored or misread the signs of disturbance in the "roe buck [...] running like driven things" (p.447) and the "unrest among the creatures that were wont to sleep through the dark hours" (p.448), Georg has reckoned without the fact that Nature and the forest have already judged them once, that Sylvester Night (New Year's Eve) is more than a mere festivity, it is the pagan worship accorded to a powerful deity.

In their newfound friendship they carelessly tempt fate again. "Each prayed a private prayer that his men might be the first to arrive, so that he might be the first to show honourable attention to the enemy that had become a friend" (p.451). But this prayer with its element of self-centred pride is a prayer that cannot be answered impartially and Supernature answers it as impersonally and cruelly as in the moment of their being trapped by the tree. They raise "their voices in a prolonged hunting call" (p.451) in unison for the first and last time, and their call is answered, but instead of summoning help, they call down on themselves their ultimate fate - summed up in the last word of the story: "'Wolves'" (p.452). Significantly it is Ulrich who sees them and tells Georg. He has been the prime mover throughout, extending his flask and the hand of friendship. Georg asks, "'Who are they?' [...] straining his eyes to see what the other would gladly not have seen" (p.452). As with Sylvia, what is revealed to them is too late to be of any use and they suffer the same moment of brief joy before the awful truth.

Wolves and death in conjunction figure also in "The Wolves of Cernogratz", though in a mourning rather than a predatory role. In this story it is the snobbery and false values of the *nouveau riche* Gruebel family which is exposed by the supernatural element.¹⁹ The scene is a castle once belonging to the Cernogratz family and now owned by the mercenary and "eminently practical" (p.410) Baron and Baroness Gruebel, the Baroness

being the dominant figure and the Baron, like Egbert in "The Reticence of Lady Anne" or Mr Quabarl in "The Schartz-Metterklume Method", a pale imitation. "The one poetically-dispositioned member" of the family, "a prosperous Hamburg merchant" (p.410) is the Baroness's brother Conrad who wants to know if there are "'any old legends attached to the castle'" (p.410). In typically scornful fashion, the "Baroness Gruebel shrugged her plump shoulders", saying, "'There are always legends hanging about these old places. They are not difficult to invent and they cost nothing'" (p.410). Already she has revealed the two salient features of her character; that she is mercenary and has no time for nor sense of the mysterious, imaginative side of life.

In relating the "story that when any one dies in the castle all the dogs [...] and the wild beasts in the forest howl the night long" (p.410) she adds, "'It would not be pleasant to listen to'" (p.410); and to Conrad's contradiction that "'It would be weird and romantic'" (p.410), she replies "complacently", "'Anyhow, it isn't true'" (p.410), as adept at shifting her ground in debate as the aunt in "The Lumber-Room" or Mrs De Ropp in "Sredni Vashtar". She says that she has "'had proof that nothing of the sort happens'" (p.410) (the dogmatic tone is obvious). "'When the old mother-in-law died [...] we all listened, but there was no howling'" (p.410), and again underlines her preoccupation with material things by adding, "'It is just a story that lends dignity to the place without costing anything'" (p.410).

To her great surprise "Amalie, the grey old governess" who "was wont to sit silent and prim and faded in her place" (p.410) (the implication being that she knows it is her place to be thus self-effacing) flatly contradicts her. "'The story is not as you have told it'". She continues, "rapidly and nervously, looking straight in front of her and seeming to address no one in particular" (p.410), almost as if describing a vision, "'It

is not when any one dies in the castle that the howling is heard. It was when one of the Cernogratz family died here that the wolves came from far and near and howled at the edge of the forest just before the death hour'" (pp.410-11). At the moment of death furthermore "'as the soul of the dying one left its body a tree would crash down in the park'" (p.411) and she concludes with "a note of defiance, almost of contempt, in her voice" (p.411), "'But for a stranger dying here, of course no wolf would howl and no tree would fall. Oh, no'" (p.411). This is also ironic since, in their lack of compassion and preoccupation with material wealth, the Gruebels could be said to have no souls to lose at the point of death.

The "well-fed, much-too-well-dressed" (p.411) Baroness is outraged and sneers, "'You seem to know quite a lot about the von Cernogratz legends, Fraulein Schmidt'" (p.411), but the shaft falls wide of the mark for the governess replies, "'I am a von Cernogratz myself [...] that is why I know the family history'" (p.411). An embarrassed silence follows until after the governess has left when the Baron, "his protruding eyes taking on a scandalized expression" (p.411) expostulates, "'She almost told us we were nobodies, and I don't believe a word of it'" (p.412), his infelicity of phrasing revealing a subtle irony, since in everyone's eyes but their own and those with the same values, they are precisely nobodies in the sense in which they mean. The Baroness adds indignantly, "'She knows she will soon be past work and she wants to appeal to our sympathies'" (p.412). Only Conrad believes Amalie because "being of an imaginative disposition" (p.412) "he had seen tears in the old woman's eyes when she spoke of guarding her memories" (p.412).²⁰

Despite the Baroness's callous decision to "'give her notice to go as soon as the New Year festivities are over [...] till then I shall be too busy to manage without her'" (p.412), she is thwarted by Amalie's falling ill with what proves to be her last illness. "'It is most provoking [...] I cannot remember that

she was ever seriously ill, too ill to go about and do her work, I mean'" (p.412). Her insensitivity is breathtaking as she adds perfunctorily, "'One is sorry for her, of course, she looks so withered and shrunken'" (p.412) - again it is appearances that are important. The banker's wife agrees that it is "'most annoying [and that] it is the intense cold'" (p.412), and the Baron adds his cliché, "'The frost is the sharpest that has been known in December for many years'" (p.412). These banal exchanges become even more important to them later as face-savers when Amalie dies, and the tree falls as predicted, since "'the intense cold that is splitting the trees'" (p.414) can be made to account for the otherwise inconveniently unaccountable.

Wappi, the "small, woolly lapdog [which] had leapt suddenly down from its cushion and crept shivering under the sofa" (p.412) is clearly of the household for it does not join in the "outburst of angry barking [...] from the dogs in the castle-yard, and other dogs [which] could be heard yapping and barking in the distance" (p.413).²¹ But it is a very clear sign of supernatural forces at work and parallels the restiveness of the animals in "The Music on the Hill" and the fleeing of the deer in "The Interlopers". To this noise is added "all the starved, cold misery of a frozen world, all the relentless hunger-fury of the wild, blended with other forlorn and haunting melodies to which one could give no name" (p.413), summed up by the Baron in one word (as at the end of "The Interlopers"): "'Wolves!'" (p.413) and by the Baroness as "'that terrible howling!'" (p.414). It is certainly unpleasant for the Gruebels, underlining as it does the truth of all that Amalie has said. The Baroness, seeking to deny the miraculous in relating it to something which she can understand and value, says, "'not for much money would I have such death-music'" (p.414), the stress of the moment revealed in the very Germanic word order. As Conrad perceptively points out, "'That music is not to be bought for any amount of money'"

(p.414), an observation which might be said to sum up the lesson to be learnt by the Gruebels.

While eagerly agreeing with the suggestion that everything surrounding Amalie's death can be put down to natural causes, it is a telling irony that in the obituary they should announce: "'On December 29th, at Schloss Cernogratz, Amalie von Cernogratz, for many years the valued friend of Baron and Baroness Gruebel'" (p.414), their ability to make capital out of a situation triumphant to the last. If they have been momentarily discomposed by the supernatural events they have successfully masked from themselves a more than temporary sense of unease, their natures so insensitive that they are beyond redemption.²²

A tree in an elemental role features in "The Interlopers" and "The Wolves of Cernogratz", it is a tree again which seals the fate of the Ladbruks in "The Cobweb", a tale set on a farm and again with the feeling of man's insignificance in the scheme of things. The timelessness of the farm and its ways is emphasised from the very first with the date of baptism of old Martha Crale "ninety-four years ago" (p.266). "For longer than any one could remember she had pattered to and fro [...] grumbling and muttering and scolding, but working unceasingly" (p.267).²³ Emma Ladbruk, the young farmer's wife and the new mistress of the farm, is of as little consequence to the old woman as "a bee wandering in at a window on a summer's day" (p.267), presumably a minor irritant soon gone. Martha "was so old and so much a part of the place, it was difficult to think of her exactly as a living thing." (p.267). This then is the obstacle standing in Emma's way, preventing her from changing the window nook "to make it bright and cozy with chintz curtains and bowls of flowers" (p.2.66) instead of years of accumulated clutter.

She has been wont to tell her friends, "'When we are more settled I shall work wonders in the way of making the kitchen habitable'" (p.266), and in this respect she resembles Thirza Yealmton in her making of 'improvements'. But the "unspoken wish in those words" is "unconfessed as well as unspoken" (p.266), and she does not admit even to herself that she ill-wishes Martha. "The musty farm parlour, looking out to a prim, cheerless garden imprisoned within high, blank walls" (p.266)²⁴ is not enough for Emma; not content to be mistress of the farm, she wishes also to be mistress of the kitchen.

As time goes by Emma "was uncomfortably conscious of another feeling towards the old woman. She was a quaint old tradition [...] part and parcel of the farm itself [...] at once pathetic and picturesque - but she was dreadfully in the way" (p.268). The arrogant dismissal of the old woman's worth in every sense is clear. Emma is a modern young woman who is "full of plans for little reforms and improvements" (p.268) (the busy quality of the "bee" in evidence here); she has "the latest science of dead-poultry dressing at her fingertips" (p.268) and can hardly bear to see old Martha trussing "the chickens for the market-stall as she had trussed them for nearly fourscore years - all leg and no breast" (p.268). Instead of letting the old woman continue as she has done for all of her long life and turning her attention to other matters, Emma allows herself to dwell on "the coveted window corner" (p.268). "For all her nominal authority [she] would not have dared or cared to displace" (p.268) the objects which clutter it; "over them seemed to be spun the protection of something that was like a human cobweb" (p.268), and plainly Martha would need to be swept away with the clutter.

Any sympathy that the reader might be tempted to feel for Emma is lessened by the shift of focus onto the old woman, who in her reminiscing and muttering as she works is given more reality

than Emma, whose fault is not in actual meddling but in the "unworthy meanness" of wishing "to see the span of that brave old life shortened by a few paltry months" (p.268). One day, however, Emma feels "a qualm of self-reproach" (p.268)²⁵ when she finds Martha "huddled in a shrunken bunch on the window seat, looking out with her dim old eyes as though she saw something stranger than the autumn landscape" (p.269), a description which calls to mind Amalie in "The Wolves of Cernogratz." Martha in seeing into the future has knowledge denied to Emma and it is fitting that the window seat so coveted by Emma should be her chosen place to rest at the moment of revelation. "'Tis death, 'tis death a-coming,'" (p.269) she says and lists all the portents that forewarned her, such as the dog howling, the screech-owl giving "the death-cry [...] something white as run across the yard yesterday [...] Ay, there's been warnings. I knew it were a-coming'" (p.269).²⁶

Emma, blinded by her "unspoken wish" (p.266), jumps to the not-unnatural conclusion that it is Martha's own death which she foresees and "hastened away to get assistance and counsel. Her husband, she knew, was down at a tree-felling some little distance off" (p.269) so that the first person she comes upon is her cousin "young Mr Jim [...] who divided his time between amateur horse-dealing, rabbit-shooting, and flirting with the farm maids" (p.269).

When told by Emma that "'old Martha is dying'" (p.269), he replies, "'Nonsense [...] Martha means to live to a hundred. She told me so, and she'll do it.'" Emma feels "contempt for the slowness and dulness of the young man" (p.269), but he has more instinctive understanding than she does. She is discomfited to see Martha "in the middle of a mob of poultry scattering handfuls of grain around her" (p.270). The old woman's temporary weakness in the instant of supernatural knowledge has left her and she is working as usual. The bitter irony is that the death she has foretold is that of Emma's

husband, "'young Mister Ladbruk'" who "'run out of the way of a tree that was coming down an' ran hissself on to an iron post'" (p.270). In coming "into the farm by way of inheritance" (p.266) he has clearly been as little attuned to its ways and with as little due reverence as his wife.

"The rabbit-shooting cousin as the next-of-kin" (p.270) in his turn now inherits the property and "Emma Ladbruk drifted out of its history as a bee that had wandered in at an open window might flit its way out again" (p.270). Widowed, homeless and of no consequence, Emma has been bitterly dealt with by a fate which seems disproportionately intolerant of a young woman who appears to have sinned only in wanting to be mistress of her kitchen. This sense of insignificance is intensified for Emma as "into her mind came the thought that for months, perhaps for years, long after she had been utterly forgotten, a white, unheeding face would be seen peering out through those latticed panes" (p.270). This much she has learned too late, a knowledge which her carefree cousin has had all along. In seeking to impose her will she has paid the penalty for overlooking the reverence due to an old woman attuned to the ways of the countryside and the knowledge which comes of experience, and is superior to the untried theory of modern science.²⁷

In each of these stories, the supernatural element seems to function in the same way as the practical joke or the child logic, to shock characters into awareness or, in extreme cases, to act as a kind of divine retribution for the sin of hubris. Despite warnings and opportunities for changing a course of action these wilfully blind rush headlong to their fate. This same theme occurs also in "The Hounds of Fate" where it is not arrogance so much as "a natural slothfulness and improvidence" (p.193) which cause Martin Stoner's downfall.²⁸ His inadequacy is stressed repeatedly in such phrases as "hopelessness had numbed his brain", "scarcely summon sufficient energy", "mental

torpor", "his mind almost a blank" (p.193) and so on throughout the ensuing pages.

Initially the reader's sympathy is engaged for the plight of Stoner who is likened to "a hard-pressed stag [...] in its last extremity" (p.193) reminiscent of the stag in "The Music on the Hill". "in his case the hounds of Fate were certainly pressing him with unrelenting insistence" (p.193), but it is not long before it is made clear that "desperation had not awakened in him any dormant reserve of energy; on the contrary, a mental torpor grew up round the crisis of his fortunes" (p.193), that is, he is a weak man who has brought his misfortune upon himself. The point is driven home again and again that Stoner is self-centred and complacent.

In stumbling upon a farm-house which "looked chill and inhospitable" (p.193) but which turns out to be the reverse in the welcome he receives from "the withered-looking old man" (p.194) who opens the door to him, his luck seems to have changed at last. He is mistaken for Tom Prike, who will inherit the farm when his aunt dies, an aunt who refuses to see him but does not deny him the right to live there despite the unspecified crime which has caused Tom to disappear four years earlier. Just as Martin Stoner never learns the nature of this crime, so it is never disclosed to the reader, and in this respect it is like "The Penance" where the reader learns at the same rate and only as much as Octavian Ruttle.

At first in his hunger and weariness it is natural for Martin to be stunned by his good fortune and justified in feeling that "the hounds of Fate seemed to have checked for a brief moment" (p.195). But he drifts on in this fashion, allowing decisions to be made for him, sinking deeper and deeper into a role which is more than convenient and much less than honest. In taking his good fortune for granted he reveals not only an improvident but a selfish nature. He is warned by the old man that "'you'll

find the folk around here has hard and bitter minds towards you. They hasn't forgotten nor forgiven'" (pp.195-96). But in being offered the chance to ride which "was one of the pleasures dearest to his heart" (p.196), he considers that "there was some protection against immediate discovery of his imposture [because] none of Tom's aforesaid companions were likely to favour him with a close inspection" (p.196). The pleasure of the moment is obviously uppermost in his mind. "The interloper" (p.196) which he knows himself to be "wondered vaguely what manner of misdeed the genuine Tom had committed to set the whole countryside against him" (p.196) and it is this fatal lack of moral fibre which is his undoing. Not only is he dishonestly exploiting the situation for his own ends, but forethought might have warned him of the possible dangers to be incurred in adopting so hated an identity.

As he rides out, it becomes evident that "the likeness which had imposed²⁹ at close quarters on a doddering old man" (p.196) (presumably Stoner's assessment of George) "was good enough to mislead younger eyes at a short distance" (p.196). This is borne out when at a later date he made "a furtive visit to the farm parlour in an endeavour to glean some fragmentary knowledge of the young man whose place he had usurped" (p.197) and comes upon a photograph of "a young man with a somewhat surly dare-devil expression [...] the likeness to himself was unmistakable" (p.197). This provides the only clue to the sort of person Tom Prike is.

Stoner might have taken heed of the "ample evidence" (p.196) of the hatred Tom has incurred and the fact that "'Bowker's pup' [...] seemed the one element of friendliness in a hostile world" (p.196). There is irony here too since, had 'Bowker', Tom's dog, still been alive Martin's imposture would have been discovered, and the fact that the "gaunt, elderly woman peering at him from behind the curtain of an upper window" (p.196)³⁰ who

is "evidently [...] his aunt by adoption" (p.196)³¹ refuses to meet him face to face, helps also to preserve him from discovery. He is aware that there are potential pitfalls: "the real Tom [...] might suddenly turn up" (pp.196-97) or "the false Tom might be called on to sign documents [...] or a relative might arrive who would not imitate the aunt's attitude of aloofness. All these things would mean ignominious exposure" (p.197). But he considers these risks preferable to the "alternatives [of] the open sky and the muddy lanes" (p.197). As things turn out this is a bitter irony indeed.

"The only time in his life that he had made a rapid decision" (p.197) is whether to have his pork hot or cold, a measure of his fatally short-sighted and superficial approach to life. But "as he gave the order he knew that he meant to stay" (p.197). Despite the fact that he is impostor-heir to the farm, "he took part in the farm-work [...] as one who worked under orders and never initiated them" (p.197) - another indication of his inadequacy - thereby salving his conscience by doing "a certain amount of work in return for the hospitality to which he was so little entitled" (p.197).

But one day, inevitably, his luck runs out and "old George" warns him that "'Michael Ley is back in the village, an' he swears to shoot you'" (p.198). Typically Stoner stammers, "'But where am I to go?'" (p.198), leaving his fate to be decided by others, in this case a "doddering old man" as Martin has dismissively described him. Stoner without the excuse of age is inferior to old George. He is furnished with money and instructions which make Martin feel "more of a cheat than ever as he stole away that night [...] with the old woman's money in his pocket" (p.198) but not enough to prevent him from taking further advantage. "He felt a throb of compunction" (p.198), evidence of one fleeting moment of genuine feeling "for those two humble friends who would wait wistfully for his return"

(p.199).³² As ever he is indulging himself with false sentiments instead of concentrating on his best course of action. He allows his mind to linger over the possibilities of their reactions if "the real Tom would come back" (p.199) and Saki's irony has never been more bitter. "For his own fate he felt no immediate anxiety [...] Fortune had done him a whimsically kind turn [...] There was a sense of relief in regaining once more his lost identity and ceasing to be the uneasy ghost of another" (p.199). The irony here is twofold since he is about to become "an uneasy ghost" in his own right. But in this sense of relief he is fatally disarmed³³ and totally unprepared when Michael Ley "stepped out from the shadow of an overhanging oak tree [...]"³⁴ with a gun" (p.199). "His white set face revealed a glare of human hate such as Stoner [...] had never seen before" (p.199).³⁵

Too late he sees the danger, but "The hounds of Fate had waited for him in those narrow lanes, and this time they were not to be denied" (p.199). Like Sylvia and Thirza and Emma, he has had several opportunities to change his destiny but he has failed to heed the warnings. Unlike them it is lack of will rather than wilfulness that is his undoing - he is one of the weak men so abhorrent to Saki. In allowing his life to be ruled by others it is a fitting irony that he has also incurred the fate earned by the man whose character he has assumed and of whose crime he has no knowledge but pays full forfeit in his dual ignorance.³⁶

An inability to face up to reality is the theme of "The Peace of Mowsle Barton" also, though in this case with comic rather than tragic effect. As the story opens in a farmyard setting yet again, "Crefton Lockyer sat at his ease, an ease alike of body and soul [...] after the stress and noise of long years of city life" (p.184). As impressionable as he is unquestioning of appearances he is a ripe candidate for Saki's favourite trick of jolting the unsuspecting and complacent into an unwelcome

awareness of reality, in this case by the introduction of witchcraft into this rural idyll. The sense of timelessness is all-pervasive as in "The Cobweb": "Time and space seemed to lose their meaning and their abruptness" (p.184). "Sleepy-looking hens and solemn preoccupied ducks were equally at home in yard, orchard, or roadway [...] even the gates were not necessarily to be found on their hinges" (p.184). The deft wittiness of description takes nothing away from the sense of peace that this order brings to Crefton, so recently escaped from the London rat race, but it does convey a sense of the slightly ridiculous element common to Octavian Ruttle, Van Cheele and others of the unthinking sort.

"Over the whole scene brooded the sense of a peace that had almost a quality of magic in it" (p.184) and Crefton "decided that here was the life-anchorage that his mind had so fondly pictured and that latterly his tired and jarred senses had so often pined for" (p.184). In wanting to believe that he has found the perfect haven, he blinds himself to the reality. "He would make a permanent lodging-place among these simple friendly people [...] falling in as much as possible with their manner of living" (p.184). Unlike Emma in "The Cobweb" he has no arrogant wish to impose his ways on time-honoured traditions and to this extent his punishment is lighter. But he is guilty of judging superficially, his naive assumption that these are "simple friendly people" soon to be radically challenged together with his wish to fall in "as much as possible with their manner of living". While Martin Stoner reveals an underlying arrogance in his judgement of Old George as "doddering", Crefton shows an optimistic and kindly disposition which is akin to that of Octavian Ruttle.

No sooner has he made this decision than the first intimation of discord is introduced in the form of "an elderly woman" (p.185) who "spoke in a dull impersonal manner" (p.185). "Her eyes,

however, looked impatiently over Crefton's head" (p.185). Clearly there is more to her than first appearances would suggest. His tact is called upon at once as she obliges him to read out a message inscribed on a barn door to the effect that "'Martha Pillamon is an old witch'" (p.185). He fears that she might turn out to be Martha in person since "the gaunt, withered old dame at his side might certainly fulfil local conditions as to the outward aspect of a witch" (p.185). There is a delicious irony here, because while she is not Martha she is in fact a witch.

Muttering "'It's true, every word of it [...] Martha Pillamon is an old witch'" (p.185) she hobbles off to be replaced with startling immediacy by "another old crone [...] evidently in a high state of displeasure. Obviously this was Martha Pillamon in person" (p.185). The interesting fact here is that while Crefton is correct this time in his assumption of the latest old crone's identity he is still reluctant to believe in witchcraft until much later - unable or unwilling to accept the evidence as it presents itself.

"'Tis lies, 'tis sinful lies'" avers Martha, "'tis Betsy Croot is the old witch'" (p.185) and adds in comic contradiction, "'I'll put a spell on 'em, the old nuisances'" (p.185). Crefton shows a certain ability to think quickly in interpreting the message on the door as "'vote for Soarker' [...] with the craven boldness of the practised peacemaker" (p. 186). But "somehow a good deal of the peace seemed to have slipped out of the atmosphere" (p.186), already disillusion has begun its insidious process. Matters continue to deteriorate as he discovers when he reaches the farm kitchen where Mrs Spurfield greets him with the news, "'The kettle won't boil'" (p.186) "'It's been there more than an hour an' boil it won't [...] we're bewitched'" (p.186). Crefton tries to persuade them and himself "'it must boil in time'" (p.186), but inexorably Mrs Spurfield insists that it will not, and adds, "'I suppose you'll be leaving us now

things have turned up uncomfortable [...] there are folks as deserts one as soon as trouble comes'" (p.186). Although "Crefton hurriedly disclaimed any immediate change of plans" (p.187), she is later proved correct in this prediction. He perseveres in trying to find a rational explanation for the kettle's refusal to boil, even buying a spirit-lamp kettle but when that also fails "he felt that he had come suddenly into contact with some unguessed-at and very evil aspect of hidden forces" (p.187). The fact that Martha and Betsy have called each other witches and that Betsy has threatened to cast a spell is not something he is prepared to face as yet - "the hidden forces" are still "unguessed-at".

Still hoping to "recapture the comfortable sense of peacefulness" (p.187) he goes for a walk and comes upon further disquieting evidence of witchcraft, this time when on having heard Betsy Croot muttering to herself "'let un sink as swims'" (p.187), a succession of ducks launch themselves on to the water of a pond and unaccountably drown while "Crefton gazed with something like horror" (p.188). At this moment "Martha Pillamon, of sinister reputation " (p.188) (he is beginning to believe the truth about her) shrieks "in a shrill note of quavering rage: 'Tis Betsy Croot adone it, the old rat. I'll put a spell on her'" (p.189).

This proves too much for the nervous Crefton who "knew that he was giving way to absurd fancies, but the behaviour of the spirit-lamp kettle and the subsequent scene at the pond had considerably unnerved him" (p.189). He has discovered to his consternation that "when once you have taken the Impossible into your calculations its possibilities become practically limitless" (p. 189). The following morning all the other signs of supernatural forces at work are obvious now to "his sharpened senses" (p.189): cows are "huddled" together, poultry are "querulous", the yard pump is "ominously silent" (p.189). Despite overhearing Mrs Spurfield complaining, "'He'll go away,

for sure [...] there are those as runs away [...] as soon as real misfortune shows itself" (p. 190), on this occasion, "Crefton felt that he probably was one of 'those' and that there were moments when it was advisable to be true to type" (p.190).

His eyes opened to reality at last, Crefton leaves behind the farm over which "brooded that air of magic possession which Crefton had once mistaken for peace" (p.190). When considered alongside his first impression of the farmyard over which "brooded the sense of a peace that had almost a quality of magic in it" (p.184) it can be seen how far Crefton's perceptions have changed. Peace, it appears, is, after all, a state of mind as he returns to "the bustle and roar of Paddington Station [which] smote on his ears with a welcome protective greeting" (p.190). Ironically the first person to greet him, described with deliberate ambiguity as "a fellow-traveller" (p.190), trots out a favourite cliché: "'Very bad for our nerves, all this rush and hurry [...] give me the peace and quiet of the country'" (p.190). But Crefton knows better, though it takes the improbability of witchcraft to open his eyes.

This unwillingness to admit to the seemingly impossible despite a series of almost unmistakable signs and portents is apparent also in "Gabriel-Ernest", the story of a werewolf who hunts by night and inhabits the body of a youth during the daytime. As in the previous story, the tone is light and, while there is an element of the macabre, essentially comic in effect. Van Cheele's main failing is that he thinks too little and talks too much, a fact which is both explicitly stated ("talked incessantly" (p.63), "found himself engaged in the novel process of thinking before he spoke" (p.64), "contrary to his usual wont, did not feel disposed to be communicative" (p.66) and Van Cheele "did not stop for anything as futile as thought" (p.68),

for example) and implicitly in the exchanges with Cunningham and Gabriel-Ernest himself.

Van Cheele fancies himself as a man of science, a view backed up by his domineering aunt but with little evidence to support it. What he lacks is imagination unlike the perceptive artist who opens the story by remarking, "'There is a wild beast in your woods'" (p.63). Instantly dismissing it as an impossibility it is not till later that Van Cheele thinks to ask Cunningham, "'What did you mean about a wild beast?'" (p.63). Cunningham, however, is reticent: "'Nothing. My imagination'" (p.63). At the end of the story the reason for his reluctance to say more is explained. "'My mother died of some brain trouble [...] so you will understand why I am averse to dwelling on anything of an impossibly fantastic nature that I may see or think that I have seen'" (p.68). Cunningham then has every reason to doubt what he has seen though he knows both that he has an imagination and that he has seen something quite extraordinary. By contrast Van Cheele has no imagination whatsoever and even when confronted with incontrovertible evidence refuses to believe what he sees because it does not fit in with his theories of what is possible.³⁷

Cunningham has only seen at a distance a naked boy vanishing with the dying sun and "'on the open hillside where the boy had been standing a second ago [...] a large wolf, blackish in colour, with gleaming fangs and cruel, yellow eyes'" (p.68). Van Cheele on the other hand has conversed with the werewolf-boy on two occasions at close quarters. On the first occasion all sorts of hints are dropped: he lives "'here, in these woods'" (p.64), he doesn't "'sleep at night; that's my busiest time'" (p.64), he feeds on "'flesh' [...]" and he pronounced the word with slow relish, as though he were tasting it" (p.64), "'it's quite two months since I tasted child-flesh'" (p.65). He

continues, "'at night I hunt on four feet [...] I don't fancy any dog would be very anxious for my company'" (p.65).³⁸

The more flustered Van Cheele becomes, the more he blusters: "'I can't have you staying in these woods,' he declared authoritatively" (p.65), to which the boy disconcertingly replies, "'I fancy you'd rather have me here than in your house'" (p.65). And this is no idle threat since in due course he turns up as naked as before in Van Cheele's morning room. "As a parish councillor and justice of the peace" (p.66) Van Cheele is very conscious of his position and in remembering "that uncanny remark about childflesh eaten two months ago" (p.66) feels that "such dreadful things should not be said even in fun" (p.66), a sentiment that brings to mind the old saw: 'many a true word is spoken in jest'. As a consequence "at dinner that night he was quite unusually silent" (p.66), a circumstance which causes his aunt to remark with telling irony, "'One would think you had seen a wolf'" (p.66).

The following morning his sense of disquiet persuades him to visit Cunningham in search of enlightenment and "with this resolution taken, his usual cheerfulness partially returned, and he hummed a bright little melody" (p.66). This mood of complacency is rudely shattered, however, by the presence in his morning room of "the boy of the woods. He was drier than when Van Cheele had last seen him, but no other alteration was noticeable in his toilet" (p.67). Van Cheele's immediate concern is to cover up for him in every sense, concealing his nakedness beneath the *Morning Post*³⁹ and explaining to his aunt that he "'has lost his way - and lost his memory'" (p.67). In hoping that the boy was not "going to add inconvenient candour to his other savage propensities" (p.67), the ironic inversion draws attention to the false values of polite society and is a neat antithesis of the ironic reference to Van Cheele's

'learning' on p.64 where the "hearers [...] felt that he was being absolutely frank with them".

An amusing dialogue ensues with the aunt in typically dogmatic fashion organising clothes and an identity for him. "'We must call him something till we know who he really is [...] Gabriel-Ernest, I think; those are nice suitable names'" (p.67). She quite clearly sees nothing strange about him, blinder even than Van Cheele, though "his staid and elderly spaniel had bolted out of the house at the first incoming of the boy" (p.67), a clear indication of supernatural presence and reminiscent of Wappi in "The Wolves of Cernogratz". Still, however, Van Cheele is not sufficiently convinced of what he suspects and he hares off by train to consult Cunningham, leaving Gabriel-Ernest to "help her [his aunt] to entertain the infant members of her Sunday-school class at tea that afternoon" (p.68), the wisdom of which should have been doubtful even to an idiot like Van Cheele.

On having his worst suspicions confirmed "he dismissed the idea of a telegram. 'Gabriel-Ernest is a werewolf was a hopelessly inadequate effort at conveying the situation" (p.68). The picture of him "tearing at top speed towards the station" (p.68) recalls the picture of Octavian Ruttle chasing the children towards the pigsty, at last prodded into direct action. It is, of course, too late by the time he reaches home to discover that Gabriel-Ernest has been entrusted to take "'the little Toop child home [...] It was getting so late, I thought it wasn't safe to let it go back alone'" (p.69), as his aunt informs him, the irony being that the child -"it"- would have been safer on its own than with Gabriel-Ernest. Van Cheele "at a speed for which he was scarcely geared [...] raced along the narrow lane that led to the home of the Toops" (p.69), his eyes opened at last to the reality of the situation. "Nothing was ever seen again of the Toop child or Gabriel-Ernest" (p.69), but it is assumed from the evidence of "the latter's discarded garments"

(p.69) that he has drowned in an attempt to save the child. Like the mother of the gardener's boy in "The Elk",⁴⁰ "Mrs Toop, who had eleven other children, was decently resigned to her bereavement" (p.69), but Miss Van Cheele erects a "memorial brass [...] to 'Gabriel-Ernest, an unknown boy, who bravely sacrificed his life for another'" (p.69).

This last is too much for Van Cheele, and "he flatly refused to subscribe to the Gabriel-Ernest memorial" though he "gave way to his aunt in most things" (p.69). While Van Cheele learns the truth too late, at any rate to save the child,⁴¹ his aunt never learns the truth at all, and remains in a state of sublime ignorance while "sincerely" mourning "her lost foundling" (p.69). It is a bitter indictment of her inability to judge character that the wicked werewolf boy should so completely deceive her while the innocent Toop child, a member of her Sunday school class, should never progress beyond the status of 'it'. Even Van Cheele has been able to discern something uncanny about the boy from the first encounter.

If lack of imagination is responsible for what happens in "Gabriel-Ernest" it could be said that in "The Pond", the opposite is the case. Mona, the reader is told, "had always regarded herself as cast for the tragic role" (L.p.281), and this weakness for self-dramatisation blinds her to the truth and leads her again and again to the pond where she toys with the idea of suicide. "In marrying John Waddacombe, Mona had mated herself with a man who shared none of her intimacy with the shadowy tragedies of what she called the half-seen world" (L.p.281). Unlike the other characters in this chapter so far, she is too inclined to believe in the supernatural and this distorts her perception of reality.

John could hardly be more down to earth, concerned as he is with "potato blight, swine fever" (L.p.281) and other such unromantic practicalities. He "was of the loam, loamy" (L.p.282). "The

tragic discovery" (L.p.282) made by Mona within days of her wedding that she and John are mismatched was obvious to all but her. "John was fond of her in his own way, and she, in her quite different way, was more than a little fond of him" (L.p.282)⁴² but they speak a different language and "while John was busy and moderately happy with his farm troubles, Mona was dull, unoccupied, and immoderately unhappy with her own trouble" (L.p.282). During one of "her moody, listless rambles [...] she came across the pond" (L.p.282). The fact that "standing water was a rarity" in the "high chalky soil" (L.p.282) and that apart from "the artificially made duck-pond [. . .] and one or two cattle pools, Mona knew of no other for miles around" (L.pp.282-83), provide the clues to what finally happens.

It is "overspread with gloomy yews [...] was not a cheerful spot" and "the only human suggestion that could arise in connection with the pool was the idea of a dead body floating on its surface" (L.p.283), the supernatural element being present in the atmosphere and her imagination. As time goes by Mona's obsession with the pond increases, "with its suggestion of illimitable depths" (L.p.283), and increasingly it is herself whom she imagines floating, Ophelia-like, "with the daylight and moonlight reaching down to her through the overarching catafalque of yew and beech" (L.p.283). The idea of suicide appeals to her more and more strongly and "there seemed a spirit lurking in its depths and smiling on its surface that beckoned her to lean further and yet further over its edge" (L.p.283).

And then providentially, "John Waddacombe, hearty as an ox, and seemingly proof against weather exposure, fell suddenly and critically ill with a lung attack" (L.p.284). It is as if Fate has deliberately intervened to prevent her tragedy, for she discovers in nursing him that he is "far more loveable and sympathetic" and "husband and wife found that they had more in

common than they had once thought possible" (L.p.284). Mona puts all thoughts of suicide from her, but "the morbid undercurrent" (L.p.284) of her nature draws her to revisit the pond and as she "peered down at the dark, ugly pool" she shudders to think of "an end so horrible as choking and gasping to death in those foul, stagnant depths" (L.p.285). She has moved closer to reality in this imagining of her death as something horrible instead of her former romanticised picture of it, although as events show she is still blind to the reality of the pond.

Ironically just at the moment of this revelation of the grotesque nature of drowning "the thing that she recoiled from in disgust seemed to rise up towards her as though to drag her down in a long-deferred embrace" (L.p.285). She loses her footing and falls to what she imagines to be her doom through endless moments in which she has time to perceive her true feeling for "John whom she loved with all her heart" (L.p.285). This ending seems unutterably cruel and it is with relief that the reader learns of Mona's second reprieve since the pond has been discovered to be "'only about an inch and a half deep'" (L.p.286).

Apart from a brief exchange in the first paragraph where a fortune-teller had hinted, "'You will marry the man of your choice, but afterwards you will pass through strange fires'" (L.p.281), a prediction which turns out to be true enough in the manner of such generalisations, the only dialogue throughout occurs in the last paragraph. And this conversation between John and Mona marks a change in mood and tempo from the slow, brooding, melancholy narrative, evocative of Mona's mood, to a light and direct exchange which better than any description illustrates how Mona has learnt to relate to her husband on his own terms. When she appears, covered in mud, and explains that she has "'slipped into a pond'" (L.p.285), John is astonished.

"'I didn't know there was such a thing for miles around'" (L.p.286). Mona admits the truth by saying, "'Well, perhaps it would be an exaggeration to call it a pond'" (L.p.286). Even though there is "a faint trace of resentment in her voice" (L.p.286), she has learnt completely the nature of reality. In this comic, undignified picture of her, covered in mud and literally brought down to earth, Mona might aptly be described as "of the loam, loamy" (L.p.282) like her husband and this resolution is as neat as only Saki could devise.

While it is true that the inexorability of fate is certainly present throughout these tales, the dispute about free will and determinism remains largely unresolved. In some cases where the central character is faced with death there is the feeling that no matter what happens they are doomed, "The Interlopers" being the prime example of this.⁴³ Yet in "The Hounds of Fate" as with most others, at every stage there are choices to be made, other courses to be pursued, and it is clearly the central character who has inflicted his fate upon himself. If in "The Cobweb", for instance there is a feeling that Emma has never had much chance, that some of her feelings may be understandable and that she has been punished out of all proportion to her crime, this is very much an exception to Saki's norm where retribution is usually very much in keeping with and in strict proportion to the enormity of the misdeed. It could be argued that even in "The Interlopers" the episode as described in the story is the final act of an ongoing saga most of which has been enacted 'offstage' and that the previous scenes leading to this inevitable denouement have contained all the opportunities for making other decisions and choosing another fate. Certainly, much of this may be deduced from the description of the characters, and their childish attitudes to each other. Perhaps Saki's standpoint may be most readily seen in "The Pond" where Mona's obviously fatalistic view of life is mocked in no uncertain terms.

Of the remaining nine stories in the supernatural category, two are political satires: "The Infernal Parliament" which in tone and treatment has more affinity with the early "Alice" sketches than with most of the later short stories, and "'Ministers of Grace'" where the political personalities of the day, easily identifiable under such pseudonyms as Quinston, Kedzon and Lord Hugo Sizzle, for instance,⁴⁴ are substituted by angels and the character of the original absorbed by an animal or bird. It is worthy of note that the perpetrator of these angel substitutions, the young Duke of Scaw, is attacked and killed by a swan (the same fate as befalls Thirza in "The Holy War") which has assimilated the character of Kedzon. The Duke, in claiming "'it's not every one who would have the knowledge or the power necessary'" (p.216), cannot be allowed as a human tampering with the supernatural to escape unscathed but in his assumption of superhuman powers pays the penalty for hubris.

A similar fate and for similar reasons overtakes Cornelius Appin in what is probably the most famous of Saki's tales of the supernatural: "Tobermory". In teaching that naturally superior animal, the cat, to talk, he looses on the house party a disconcerting witness to all manner of social misdemeanours. "A narrow ornamental balustrade ran in front of most of the bedroom windows at the Towers, and it was recalled with dismay that this had formed a favourite promenade for Tobermory at all hours" (p.112). In order to prevent embarrassing disclosures it is resolved by the house guests to kill the talking cat and when Appin protests, "'But my great discovery! [...] after all my years of research and experiment -'" (p.113), he is told uncompromisingly by Mrs Cornett, "'You can go and experiment on the shorthorns at the farm [...] or the elephants at the Zoological Gardens [...] they have this recommendation, that they don't come creeping about our bedrooms and under chairs, and so forth'" (p.113).

From being the family pet, Tobermory is suddenly an outcast and, in revealing the hypocrisies of the house-party and scratching below the thin veneer of cordiality and politesse, shows not only that he is superior to the human being but also that he knows it. In answering Mavis Pellington's question about his views on her intelligence, he exposes Lady Blemley's hypocrisy by saying, "'Sir Wilfrid protested that you were the most brainless woman of his acquaintance'" and "'Lady Blemley replied that [...] you were the only person she could think of who might be idiotic enough to buy their old car. You know, the one they call 'The Envy of Sisyphus' because it goes quite nicely up-hill if you push it'" (p.111). Since that very morning Lady Blemley had indeed suggested to Mavis that she buy the car in question Lady Blemley is unmasked as two-faced. Tobermory is not only intelligent he is clearly well-educated too.

But it is Major Barfield who with elephantine subtlety "plunged in heavily to effect a diversion. 'How about your carryings-on with the tortoise-shell puss up at the stables, eh?'" (p.111). The consternation is general and while Tobermory displays a delicacy unknown to the Major in replying, "'One does not usually discuss these matters in public [...] I should imagine you'd find it inconvenient if I were to shift the conversation on to your own little affairs'" (p.111), the threat is implicit. The cat continues to enlighten the guests about matters best left hidden, recounting conversations overheard and revealing the duplicity and hypocrisy of the guests - employing just the kind of "inconvenient candour " dreaded by Van Cheele in his morning-room confrontation with Gabriel-Ernest. Despite these uncomfortable revelations the guests are united in their decision to destroy the cat as their common enemy, but they are cheated of this satisfaction by the Rectory Tom who has killed him "in unequal combat" (p.115), presumably over the tortoise-shell puss. Lady Blemley instead of rejoicing at their

deliverance takes the opportunity "to write an extremely nasty letter to the Rectory about the loss of her valuable pet" (p.115). As with the Gruebels in "The Wolves of Cernogratz" hypocritical habits are too deeply ingrained, are in fact too necessary to the fabric of their society, to suffer more than a temporary interruption by supernatural events.

And the man behind the "Beyond-cat" (p.109), obviously foolish enough to take Mrs Cornett's advice, is killed by "an elephant in the Dresden Zoological Garden, which had shown no previous signs of irritability" (p.115). While they get his first name right, "the victim's name was variously reported in the papers as Oppin and Eppelin" (p.115); and thus was the instigator of the most astonishing discovery consigned to oblivion. As Clovis sardonically observes, "'If he was trying German irregular verbs on the poor beast [...] he deserved all he got'" (p.115). Cornelius may have been instrumental in teaching Tobermory to speak but in so doing he is merely the tool of some higher power in "the domain of miracle" (p.109), which has life and death in its gift. In claiming for himself "'my great discovery'" (p. 113) he is guilty of hubris and pays the ultimate penalty.

Social pretensions and hypocrisy are also the subjects of "The Hedgehog" which starts off at a vicarage garden party where "for the past five-and-twenty years at least mixed doubles of young people had done exactly the same thing on exactly the same spot at about the same time of year" (p.474). As in "The Peace of Mowsle Barton" and "The Cobweb" there is a sense of timelessness in which "the young people changed [...] but very little else seemed to alter" (p.474). Into this idyll is introduced the discordant element of the mutual enmity of Mrs Dole and Mrs Hatch-Mallard - a function similar to the old crones in "The Peace of Mowsle Barton" translated to a polite setting. After an interlude of bitchy conversations like those of the

"Reginald" sketches or *The Watched Pot*, full of deliberate misunderstandings and contradiction, the discussion, instigated by the peace-loving Mrs Norbury, moves on to ghosts.

A friend of hers, Ada Bleek, is coming to stay and being "highly clairvoyante, a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter" (p.476) and belonging "to that Research Society, you know" (p.476),⁴⁵ is hoping to see a ghost. Mrs Dole immediately insists that she will "see the unhappy Lady Cullumpton, the most famous of all the Exwood ghosts" (p.476)⁴⁶ and goes on to tell how her ancestor, Sir Gervase Cullumpton, strangled his new bride, describing the event in gruesome detail and with matter-of-fact relish. Not to be outdone Mrs Hatch-Mallard snobbishly and peremptorily dismisses that ghost as "a trashy, traditional apparition [...] only vouched for by house-maids and tipsy stable-boys" (p.476) whereas her "uncle's ghost was seen by a Rural Dean, who was also a Justice of the Peace" (p.477).⁴⁷

In the event Ada Bleek sees neither. What she does see, is "a huge white hedgehog with baleful yellow eyes" and "black, loathsome claws that clicked and scraped along the floor" (p.478), these "baleful yellow eyes" calling to mind the "cruel yellow eyes" (p.68) of the werewolf in "Gabriel-Ernest". In order to avoid insulting Mrs Hatch-Mallard whose house the Norburys are renting, "Hugo Norbury, who is not naturally a man of brilliant resource, had one of the really useful inspirations of his life" (p.478). He pretends that they have played a practical joke on her. Thus Ada Bleek is punished for her claims to be psychic, just as Mona in "The Pond" learns the dangers of dabbling in the occult.

It is a practical joke also that causes the pathologically mean Laploshka to die and begin the haunting of the narrator of "The Soul of Laploshka". He is described as "one of the meanest men [...] and quite one of the most entertaining. He said horrid

things about other people in such a charming way [...] Hating anything in the way of ill-natured gossip ourselves, we are always grateful to those who do it for us" (p.72), it can be seen how easily he would have fitted in to the social circle in "Tobermory", for instance. By tricking Laploshka into paying for a meal and thereby causing him to die of heart-failure, "there arose the problem of what to do with his two francs. To have killed Laploshka was one thing; to have kept his beloved money would have argued a callousness of feeling of which I am not capable" (pp.73-74), this inversion of values reflecting the accepted norm for Saki's characters. Added to Laploshka's legendary meanness is a further quirk: "a two-franc cigar would be cheerfully offered to a wealthy patron" (p.72) but he would go to extremes to avoid tipping a waiter or "a hard-up companion" (p.72).

The narrator thinks he has solved the problem of getting rid of the money when he puts it into the collecting-bag of "one of the most popular Paris churches [...] for 'the poor of Monsieur le Curé'" (p.74) because he has overheard someone say, "'They do not want money [...] they have no poor. They are all pampered'" (p.74). But then begins a series of visitations from Laploshka's reproachful ghost since "evidently the poor of Monsieur le Curé had been genuine poor" (p.74). This haunting continues for some time until on another visit to the church - "it was probably Easter, for the crush was worse than ever" (p.75) as he cynically observes - he is able to retrieve the two francs when an English lady asks him to drop it in the collection bag for him. "The delicate mission of bestowing the retrieved sum on the deserving rich still confronted me" (p.75) but this he ingeniously solves when, by "putting a strong American inflection into the French which I usually talked with an unmistakable British accent" (p.75)⁴⁸ he quizzes "Baron R., one of the wealthiest and most shabbily dressed men in Paris" (p.75) like an American tourist and then tips him the two francs. The

ironic fact that the Baron immediately puts it into a "small box fixed in the wall" marked "'Pour les pauvres de M. le Curé'" (p.76) does not matter since, "after all, the money had been given to the deserving rich, and the soul of Laploshka was at peace" (p.76).

This story then, using the device of an uneasy ghost, again exposes hypocrisy and snobbery and false values in general, a theme which also occurs in the early story, "The Image of the Lost Soul" (1891). In this case "the fat blue pigeons that roosted and sunned themselves" (p.523) judge the stone figure "low down on the cold north side of the building" with its face "hard and bitter and downcast" to be "a demon" (p.523), though the "jackdaw, who was an authority on ecclesiastical architecture, said it was a lost soul" (p.523).

In this allegory a "sweet-voiced" (p.524) field-bird unable to find shelter "under the shade of a great angel-wing or to nestle in the sculptured folds of a kingly robe" (p.524) is protected by the "effigy of the Lost Soul". In time "the folk in the verger's lodge" who, though poor, "understood the principles of political economy" (p.524), catch the bird and cage it. Its song "came up to the parapets - a song of hunger and longing and hopelessness, a cry that could never be answered" (p.525) until "one day no song came up from the little wicker cage" (p.525) and the little bird having pined and died is thrown on to the rubbish heap. After "the coldest day of the winter" (p.525) "there was a crackling sound in the night on the Cathedral roof" and "in the morning it was seen that the Figure of the Lost Soul had toppled [...] and lay now in a broken mass on the dust-heap" (p.525).

This is curiously like "The Wolves of Cernogratz" where the plump insensitive Baroness resembles the snobbish, complacent pigeons, and the tree falls at the moment of the soul's release - a phenomenon which might be explained by the severity of the

frost. The howling of the wolves: "all the starved, cold misery of a frozen world" (p.413) is like the captive bird's song as it pines away. The pigeons and the pious saints in their superior stance, like the Gruebels, are clearly inferior in having no compassion and no souls to lose.

Another cathedral is the setting for "The Saint and the Goblin" which again features a stone image though in lighter vein. At the outset "the Saint was a philanthropist in an old-fashioned way; he thought the world, as he saw it, was good, but might be improved" (p.70) whereas the Goblin "was of opinion that the world, as he knew it, was bad, but had better be let alone" (p.70). In this unequal struggle between the unworldly idealist and the cynic, the Saint succumbs to temptation, encouraged by the knowing Goblin and discovers that "'after all, it's something to have the conscience of a goblin'" (p.72), having traded his anguished concern for the poor for a more comfortable hypocrisy.

If the Goblin is cynical he is more than matched by Laura in the story of that name, who in dying assumes various incarnations to jolt the stupid, unsuspecting and conventional Amanda out of her complacency. It is through her dialogues with Laura, Sir Lulworth and her husband, Egbert, that the full extent of Amanda's ignorance is revealed together with a humourless literal-mindedness. Ironically in her conversation with the dying Laura, who threatens to reincarnate variously as an otter and a Nubian boy, Amanda sighs, "'I wish you would be serious'" (p.243). And then on Laura's death, she complains to Sir Lulworth about the inconvenient timing since, "'I've asked quite a lot of people down for golf and fishing, and the rhododendrons are just looking their best'" (p.243). Sir Lulworth responds ironically, "Laura always was inconsiderate [...] she was born during Goodwood week, with an Ambassador staying in the house who hated babies" (p.243).⁴⁹

The dialogue continues with Amanda revealing that like Octavian Ruttle "she was one of those who shape their opinions rather readily from the standpoint of those around them" (p.243),⁵⁰ which is the reason that she is being punished by the appearance of the otter just as Laura has promised. It is, however, appearances as ever which preoccupy the superficial Amanda, as she preposterously exclaims, "'I think she might at least have waited till the funeral was over'" (p.244) to which the Clovis-like Sir Lulworth replies, "'It's her own funeral, you know [...] it's a nice point in etiquette how far one ought to show respect to one's own mortal remains'" (p.244). When the otter is killed, the description of the "human look in its eyes" (p.245) is too much for Amanda who can no longer hide the truth from herself although it is not until the little Nubian boy has put in an appearance that she becomes "seriously ill" (p.245).

Amanda is unable to think for herself and it is through metempsychosis that she is jolted out of her unquestioning complacency and into an awareness of the truth. Like Octavian Ruttle, her character is easily moulded by those around her. Carried one stage further is the extreme example of Groby Lington who in his "good-natured, kindly dispositioned" (p.224) way, takes on the characteristics of a succession of pets - the ultimate chameleon. He does not even act in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience but "as an obedient concession to the more insistent but vicarious conscience of his brother" (p.224). So empty then is he of a personality or will of his own, that a parrot in the first instance, then a monkey, which has killed the parrot, and finally, when the monkey has died, a tortoise, influence him so much that he assumes all their most salient characteristics.

It is not to be thought, however, that he is condemned to a miserable life, for as someone who "laughed good-naturedly and

admitted to himself the cleverness" (p.225) of the caricature of him drawn by the children (who as ever show a superior perception), he deserves a better fate than that. In assuming the characteristics of the monkey, he incurs the displeasure of his servants who lament the disappearance of a "cheerful, well-dispositioned body, who gave no particular trouble" (p.228),⁵¹ but has the fun of outraging the prim Miss Wepley by firing her cough sweets at her in church. Worse than this is the episode concerning the half-naked figure of the plump stable-boy whose clothes have been thrown into a tree by the monkey while the boy is bathing.⁵² Instead of rescuing them from the monkey, Groby tosses the boy bodily into a clump of nettles and goes off laughing maniacally.

But his finest hour arrives when the plump and self-important Leonard Spabbink, who in many respects resembles Waldo Plubley in "A Touch of Realism",⁵³ drives Groby to an extremity of rage by his snoring. Groby, in trying to drown him in his bedroom, knocks over a candle which sets the room alight. Still preoccupied with his savage intent to drown Spabbink he carries him to the pond in the garden and is hailed as a hero for saving him from the fire.⁵⁴ Spabbink's protests are ignored and Groby is awarded a medal. Like Van Cheele's refusal to subscribe to Gabriel-Ernest's memorial, Spabbink declined "to attend the ceremonial presentation of the Royal Humane Society's life-saving medal" (p.230). In the natural course of things the monkey dies and with it the unruly element of Groby's personality. It is entirely appropriate that the story should end with "'Old Uncle Groby'" (p.231), as the children affectionately call him, pottering around the garden with his new pet tortoise, which is quite in character.

Thus it can be seen that at one extreme there is the domineering woman such as Thirza Yealnton in "The Holy War" who must be eliminated from a world which cannot contain her energetic interference, or Sylvia Seltoun who must be punished for denying the existence of something which she refuses to acknowledge; and at the other extreme, the protean Groby Lington whose personality is so formless that Supernature in abhorring a vacuum peoples him with the personality of his pets.

The Windows of the Soul

As in the previous chapter, the numerous references to "eyes" have great significance both in giving clues to underlying truths behind the careful facade and in stressing the distorted perception of the characters. In "The Music on the Hill", for instance, the figure of the externally beautiful boy has "unutterably evil eyes" (p.163) and Gabriel-Ernest is variously described as "strange-eyed" (p.65) and with "those tigerish yellow eyes" (p.65). The eyes of the ghost hedgehog are described as "baleful yellow eyes", "narrow, yellow eyes of indescribable evil" and "cruel, hideous eyes" (p.478), all very reminiscent of "those tigerish yellow eyes" of the werewolf-boy, and which on his changing into "a large wolf, blackish in colour, with gleaming fangs and cruel, yellow eyes" (p.68) bring to mind also "the unutterably evil eyes" of Pan.

The feeling that there is more to someone or something than 'meets the eye' is obvious also in the "'Jermyn-Street-look'" (p.161) in "'Dead Mortimer's'" eyes, a side of his character which proves preferable to the Pan-worshipper released by Sylvia when she insists that they leave Town for Yessney. Again in "'Ministers of Grace'" there is the hint of unplumbed depths when "the young Duke said nothing, but his eyes shone with quiet exultation" (p.222). Conflicting messages are again present when Ada Bleek "her eyes looking very tired, but ablaze with

excitement" (p.477) recounts her vision of the ghostly hedgehog, the tiredness explained by her having spent half the night reading "*Popple's County History*" and the excitement in having realised her ambition to see a ghost. The eyes again tell a different story in "The Peace of Mowsle Barton" when Betsy's eyes "looked impatiently over Crefton's head" (p.185) and Martha's "eye caught the chalk inscription" (p.186) revealing an awareness that has nothing to do with an ability to read. Because "he had seen tears in the old woman's eyes" (p.412) Conrad believes the unlikely truth of Amalie's tale, and it is a pity for Thirza that she "did not see the look that came into his eyes" (L.p.289), or paid more heed to the fact that in Bevil's "eyes it had been a wonderful and desirable abode for mortal man" (L.p.287) and that the orchard which she has destroyed "made one's eyes ache with longing" (L.p.288). Groby Lington likewise, if he had paid closer attention to the monkey, might have been warned by the "fitful red light in its eyes" (p.226).

The expressive quality of the eyes is clear in "Laploshka's reproachful eyes" (p.74) and "his eyes furtively⁵⁵ watching me" (p.75). Mona's "large dark eyes" (L.p.281) are obviously soulful while "Mr Lington had his eyes closed" (p.227) not only in simulating innocent prayer but possibly in order to hide the expression in them. "The darkling eyes" of the Lost Soul reveal hidden depths while contrasting poignantly with "the bright-eyed bird" (p.524), the hint of unshed tears in "bright-eyed" foretold by the great bell: "'after joy ... sorrow'" (pp.524 and 525). "Bulging eyes" denote a certain kind of character, usually someone preoccupied with material rather than spiritual or intellectual matters. For instance, "Laploshka said nothing, but his eyes bulged a little" (p.73), "Belturbet saw, with bulging eyes" (p.216) the Duke of Scaw perform miracles of koepenicking⁵⁶ in "'Ministers of Grace'" and in "The Wolves of

Cernogratz" the Baron's "protruding eyes" took on "a scandalized⁵⁷ expression" (p.411).

The nature of Emma's sin in "The Cobweb" is revealed when she "cast covetous eyes" (p.266) on the window nook, and while old Martha "looking out with her dim old eyes as though she saw something stranger than the autumn landscape" (p.269) is aware of what is important and real in this world and the next, "the young woman's eyes clouded with pity" (p.269), that facile sentimentality also clouding her judgement. Sylvia in "The Music on the Hill" is similarly blind, even to the "intent unfriendly eyes" (p.162) of the dog and it is only at the moment of death that "her eyes were filled with the horror of something she saw other than her oncoming death" (p.166). The fact that "Stoner had eyes for little else than the bed" (p.195), that "evidently the likeness [...] was good enough to mislead younger eyes at a short distance" (p.196) and that "his sanctuary became in his eyes a place of peace and contentment" (p.198) in the moment of his having to leave it, are powerful indications of the sort of person he is. The blindness of "The Interlopers" is emphasised throughout: Georg "was nearly blinded with the blood which trickled across his eyes" (p.449), "'there is so much blood caked round my eyes'" (p.450), "'I can't see distinctly'" (p.451), until in the last moment of unwelcome revelation, "straining his eyes to see what the other would gladly not have seen" (p.452) - the unforeseen "interlopers" in the shape of wolves.

There are some who cannot be deceived, however, as the ironic observation that Groby Lington "had never been a hero in the eyes of his personal retainers" (p.228)⁵⁸ makes clear. The Goblin too reveals his knowingness in "being too well bred to wink" (p.71) but it is Tobermory who is demonstrably superior in giving nothing away: "'he blinked at me in his usual way'" (p.110) says Sir Wilfrid, "his face white beneath its tan and his eyes dilated with excitement" (p.110) in sharp contrast to

the cat's inscrutability. Ada Bleek's reaction to a brush with the supernatural is immediately called to mind also.

Sound Effects

Apart from visual clues, inappropriate laughter is another common motif which warns of the sinister, of 'times out of joint' or that there is something stranger than is readily apparent. In "Gabriel-Ernest", the werewolf boy "laughed a weird low laugh" (p.65), "pleasantly like a chuckle and disagreeably like a snarl" (p.65) and then later, "the boy laughed again, a laugh in which the snarl had nearly driven out the chuckle" (p.65). Similarly disconcerting is the behaviour of the old crone in "The Peace of Mowsle Barton" who "would break off into a shrill laugh, with a note of malice in it that was not pleasant to hear" (p.187), but it is revealing in the same way as the expression in her eyes. The "echo of a boy's laughter, golden and equivocal" (pp.163 and 166) discloses the true nature of Pan, his beautiful external appearance belying the evil within, visible in his eyes.

The "unrepentant chuckle" (p.242) that Laura emits is indicative of her true character, while in "The Infernal Parliament", "the Fiend, laughing unpleasantly" (p.554) acts perfectly consistently. Martin Stoner "laughed mirthlessly" (p.195), and when invited to ride he "stammered [...] almost laughing" (p.195) that he had no suitable clothes to wear, these inept responses saying much about the weakness of his character. The changing of Groby's personality from someone who "laughed good-naturedly" (p.225) - almost the only instance of laughter which is natural and appropriate in these stories of the supernatural - is marked by the "peal of shrill laughter from Groby" (p.229) performing his monkey tricks. This hysterical sound finds an echo in the "idiotic chattering laugh of a man unstrung with hideous fear" (p.452) when Ulrich sees the wolves in "The Interlopers". Earlier Georg has emitted a "short, snarling

laugh" (p.449), and "he laughed again, mockingly and savagely" (p.449) - both of which strongly recall the laughter of Gabriel-Ernest and stress the almost subhuman status of Ulrich and Georg. The "sardonic snort" of Mrs Hatch-Mallard in "The Hedgehog" (p.475) says much about her mirthless nature, while the "half-jeering, half-reproachful murmur" (L.p.284) of "The Pond" shows the conflicting undercurrents of Supernature, the seeming innocence and underlying malignity.

As Dorothy Scarborough points out, "inexplicable music forms one of the commonest elements of mystification in these romances",⁵⁹ though perhaps it is only in "The Music on the Hill" that the sinister supernatural role of music is employed - the Pan pipes luring the animals to hunt Sylvia and "the pipe music [which] shrilled suddenly around her" (p.165) adding to the frisson of fear. The unearthly description of the baying of hounds as "the music of the pack" (p.165) is echoed in "The Wolves of Cernogratz" where the howling of the wolves is described as "haunting melodies" (p.413) adding to the poignancy of the story just like the birdsong in "The Image of the Lost Soul".

The music - church music - in "The Soul of Laploshka", however, serves a quite different purpose, that of showing the preoccupation of the fashionable with the trappings of religion rather than its spiritual significance. In "Gabriel-Ernest" and "Tobermory" music plays a humorous role, in the former to underline Van Cheele's complacency as "he hummed a bright little melody" (p.66) just prior to the rude shock of the werewolf-boy's appearance in his morning room; and in the latter where the "lugubrious rendering of 'Mélisande in the Wood'" (p.114) highlights the hopeless attempts at observing social conventions while the murderous intentions against Tobermory predominate.

In general, then, it can be seen that all these recurrent elements combine to present a picture of conflicting messages, where what seems on the surface to be reasonable and credible masks a seething cauldron of improbable possibilities. In the acceptance of the Impossible into the reckoning, the "Domain of Miracle" opens up a fantastic world where human values are reversed and the incredible acquires great plausibility. Whether the device be witchcraft, metempsychosis or some other form of supernatural intervention, man with his follies and vanities is revealed in all his insignificance, eternally subordinate to this supernatural regime.

While it is certainly true that Saki has adopted some of the conventions of the supernatural genre of his day, notably in the sinister music in "The Music on the Hill", the behaviour of the dogs in "The Wolves of Cernogratz" and "Gabriel-Ernest", and of the animals in general in their restive awareness of an uncanny presence, his use of such devices is selective and idiosyncratic. He remains true to disconcerting, inversionist type, the supernatural basically a powerful means of upsetting the conventionally-minded or overturning the accepted and unquestioned rules of a complacent and unsuspecting society. Thus by taking "the Impossible into your calculations its possibilities become practically limitless". Carried one step farther, it is tempting to believe that in this phrase there is a conscious echo of Sherlock Holmes's injunction to Dr Watson: "How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?"⁶⁰

Notes

1 For an invaluable discussion of "The Gothic Romance" and the role of the supernatural in fiction in general see Dorothy Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917).

2 Saki makes direct reference to this work in "The Romancers", p.280.

3 According to Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.146, *Peter Pan*, first performed in 1904, was the most successful play of the year. "Pan is a particularly omnipresent figure of the period".

4 Ibid., p.140: "Among its members and associates in its first year [1882] was Arthur Balfour, Leslie Stephen, John Ruskin, John Addington Symonds, the biologist A.R. Wallace, The Rev. C.L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury". He goes on to say that Tennyson, William James, Freud and Jung, Andrew Lang and Henri Bergson were also contributing members over the years.

5 Everett F. Bleiler in *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1983). They are, in alphabetical order: "The Cobweb" (second-sight); "Gabriel-Ernest" (werewolf); "The Hedgehog" (ghost); "The Infernal Parliament" (Hell); "Laura" (metempsychosis); "'Ministers of Grace'" (angels); "The Music on the Hill" (Pan); "The Open Window" (ghosts); "The Peace of Mowsle Barton" (witchcraft); "The Remoulding of Groby Lington" (assuming animal characteristics); "The Saint and the Goblin" (pathetic fallacy); "The Seventh Pullet" (supernatural death); "The She-Wolf" (Transiberian magic); "The Soul of Laploshka" (ghost); "Sredni Vashtar" (prayers answered); "Tobermory" (talking animal) and "The Wolves of Cernogratz" (animals and nature mourn). To these might be added: "The Interlopers" and "The Hounds of Fate" (a malign presence); "The Image of the Lost Soul" (pathetic fallacy); "The Pond" (brooding fate) and "The Holy War" (animal retribution); and the following deleted: "The Open Window", "The She-Wolf" and "The Seventh Pullet" as belonging perhaps more naturally with the other stories in the chapter entitled "The Realms of Fiction", while "Sredni Vashtar" has already been discussed in "Inexorable Child-logic".

6 *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, p.294.

7 See footnote 5 above.

8 "The Music on the Hill", p.161.

Don Henry Otto, 'The Development of Method and Meaning in the Fiction of Saki' (Unpublished dissertation, University of Southern California, 1969), p.121.

10 One of six previously uncollected stories in A.J. Langguth, *Saki: A Life of Hector Hugh Munro* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981). All page references prefixed by 'L' refer to this work.

11 Langguth calls him Revil Yealnton. The name appears only once, and with the initial letter somewhat indistinct in the microfilm version, at the very beginning of the story in *Morning Post*, May 6, 1913, p.5. Reference to the original shows that the initial letter is in fact 'B'.

12 This has the same force as "'Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar'" (p.138).

13 "The Sheep had definitely disappeared under the ice-rift" (p.513).

14 "He saw the Woman enter [...] and Conradin fervently breathed his prayer for the last time" (p.139).

15 "The Woman indulged in religion once a week at a church near by" (p.137).

16 Auberon Waugh, "Introduction", *The Chronicles of Clovis*, 1986, p.x: "The God Pan in 'Music on the Hill' is a vengeful, threatening deity."

17 Loganbill, 'A Literary and Critical Study', in his chapter on Ethics, p.98, states: "there is only one theme in Saki", about sowing and reaping.

18 The parallels of plot between "The Interlopers" and "One of the Missing" by Ambrose Bierce are discussed by Ronald Hartwell in "Fallen Timbers - a Death Trap: a comparison of Bierce and Munro", *Research Studies of Washington State University*, 49 (1981), 61-66.

19 As Loganbill puts it, this is a story about the "disgusting *nouveau riche* made fools of by forces of invisible reality in this case the supernatural" (p.146).

20 This has an echo in *The Unbearable Bassington* (p.636), in the discussion of the portrait of Francesca Bassington: "'What a curiously unequal style the artist has [...] Francesca [...] is quite the most soulless woman I've ever met.' The likeness was undoubtedly a good one, but the artist had caught an expression in Francesca's eyes which few people had ever seen there".

21 Dorothy Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* : "The dog is frequently the subject of occult fiction" (p.290).

22 Loganbill (p.146), states that "the final twist is administered by the imaginative Conrad with his newspaper notice", deducing from this that "Conrad like Mortimer is not such a fool as to disbelieve in things which he sees around him". If Conrad did insert the notice and not the Baron and Baroness Gruebel then the point of the story is lost, since Conrad never has been deceived as to Amalie's true identity and

he is "the one poetically-dispositioned member of an eminently practical family" (p.410) to whom scoring social points is meaningless. It is not Conrad who cares about the snob value of claiming a friendship with the von Cernogratz family.

23 W.D. Copley, "The Tales of Saki", *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club*, 47 (1921), 231: "He returns once more to his conception of the farm as so apparently remote, so still, yet actually so great a centre of far flung activity in the endless processes of reproduction in bird, vegetable and beast".

24 A phrase which calls to mind the "high blank wall" (p.423) in "The Penance" and "the cheerless garden" (p.137) of "Sredni Vashtar".

25 A fleeting moment of unease like Mrs De Ropp's and Octavian's.

26 Scarborough: "The use of portents is a distinct characteristic of the horror romance. Calamity is generally preceded by some sign of supernatural influence at work, some presentiment of dread" (p.39).

27 Copley (p.231): the "stranger's lack of reverence for country manners and customs rendered venerable by the passage of time".

28 Drake, "Saki's Ironic Stories", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 5 (Autumn 1963), 380: "the irony in this story seems almost unbearable on the first reading".

29 The choice of the word, "imposed," is a subtle one with its implications of deception and taking advantage.

30 A picture which also conjures up Martha's "white, unheeding face [...] peering out through those latticed panes" (p.270), in "The Cobweb".

31 Like Nicholas's "aunt by assertion" in "The Lumber-Room".

32 In "The Music on the Hill" (pp.165-66) and "The Interlopers" (p.450) respectively, similar to "the qualms" felt by Emma, Mrs De Ropp and others.

33 This same fleeting moment of relief features also in "The Music on the Hill" in the instant before Sylvia learns the awful truth, and in "Gabriel-Ernest" just before Van Cheele's second encounter with the werewolf-boy.

34 The significance of the oak tree has been discussed in the previous chapter, page 23.

35 This phrase: "white set face" recalls both "Sredni Vashtar" and "The Penance".

36 V.S. Pritchett, "The Performing Lynx", *New Statesman and Nation*, 53 (1957), 18, talks about "the drama of incurring another's fate".

37 Drake, 'Theme and Rationale in the Short Stories of Saki' (Unpublished dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1953), p.80: "He is blinded by his own conviction that this is a day of science and sanity; there are no such things as werewolves."

38 Scarborough says: "in recent fiction the werewolf is represented as an involuntary and even unconscious departure from the human, who is shocked when he learns the truth about himself" (p.172). This is patently not the case with Gabriel-Ernest who relishes his dual role, a fact which tends to reinforce the view that this use of the Supernatural is a device to shock.

39 The Tory newspaper of the day, and the precursor of the *Daily Telegraph*.

40 To be discussed in "Elaborate Futilities".

41 Drake, p.82, "the chief dupe, although he becomes cognizant too late, is not made to suffer himself".

42 Sentiments similar to *The Unbearable Bassington* where "Francesca was, in her own way, fonder of Comus than of any one else in the world" (pp.588-89).

43 Joan Aiken in her "Introduction" to *The Unbearable Bassington* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 5, talks of "a powerful sense of predestination, of fatalism. Wherever his characters go, however they act, nothing is really going to affect the ultimate outcome for them; destiny is bound to overtake them".

44 Winston Churchill, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, Lord Hugh Cecil.

45 The Society for Psychical Research, founded 1882, to explore spiritualism and the realms of the supernatural.

46 Lady Cullumpton also features in "Mark" (p.473), as the title of a mythical book: *The Reluctance of Lady Cullumpton*.

47 Which calls to mind Van Cheele's self-importance in "Gabriel-Ernest".

48 A joke modified from "Reginald's Choir Treat": "she had been twice to Fecamp to pick up a good French accent from the Americans staying there" (p.17) and improved upon in "Adrian": "'And be surrounded by Americans trying to talk French? No, thank you. I love Americans, but not when they try to talk French. What a blessing it is that they never try to talk English'" (p.142).

49 This same joke occurs almost verbatim in *The Watched Pot*, Act 1, p.867: "'She was born taking people by surprise; in Goodwood Week, I believe, with an Ambassador staying in the house who hated babies'". The exchange in "Laura" which follows: "'Insanity? No, I never heard of any. Her father lives in West Kensington, but I believe he's sane on all other subjects'" (p. 243) may be compared to *The Watched Pot*, p.889, "'Madness, no. Oh, no. At least not that one knows of. Certainly her father lives at West Kensington, but he is sane on most other subjects'".

The dialogue of "Laura" at this point has a certain feel of contrivance about it which may be explained by the surmise that Saki in failing to achieve the staging of his play (first written in 1905 according to James Redfern in his review of it in the *Spectator*, 27 August, 1943, p.194) seeks to reach a wider audience for his jokes.

50 In Octavian's case his "soul's peace depended in large measure on the unstinted approval of his fellows" (p.422).

51 An echo of the views expressed in "Sredni Vashtar" about the making of toast, p.138.

52 An episode which calls to mind "Reginald's Choir Treat", p.18.

53 To be discussed in "The Realms of Fiction". Saki seems to have a curious aversion to plump men, equating plumpness with complacency and ineptitude. Van Cheele in being described (p.69) as going "at a speed for which he was scarcely geared" might be assumed to be plump, while Waldo Plubley in "A Touch of Realism" (p.304) is "a plump, indolent young man". The odious Leonard Spabbink is variously described (p.230) as a "flabby, redundant figure", "like an ice-cream that has been taught to beg" and "pettish" and "self-satisfied". The complacent pigeons in "The Image of the Lost Soul" are also plump as is the Baroness Gruebel in "The Wolves of Cernogratz". Thus the formulaic nature of Saki's work acts as a kind of code.

54 A similar accident rescues Rex Dillot from ignominy in "Fate", p.486.

55 "Furtive" and "furtively" are favourite words in these supernatural tales, occurring several times: " Amanda looked

quickly and furtively" (p.244); Groby Lington made "a furtive downward grab" (p.227); Martin Stoner paid a "furtive visit" (p.197); the children in "The Holy War" are denied "a furtive slide" (L.p.292) and in "The Music on the Hill" there is "furtive watchful hostility" (p.162) and a "furtive sinister 'something'" (p.163).

56 "A man disguised as a Captain yesterday led a detachment of soldiers from Tegel against the Town Hall of Koepenick, had the mayor arrested, robbed the safe and drove off in a horse-drawn cab." (Translated from the German in the "Introduction" to *Der Hauptman von Koepenick* by Carl Zuckmayer, [Munich: Fischer Verlag, 1983]). The man's name was Wilhelm Voigt and he was to be the subject of a celebrated play, which first appeared in 1931, and was later made into a film. The incident was reported in the Berlin newspapers of 17 October, 1906.

The verb to "koepenick", which Saki defines thus: "to replace an authority by a spurious imitation that would carry just as much weight for the moment as the displaced original" (p.215), is obviously a topical allusion to this bold impersonation which must have made the headlines of the English newspapers of Saki's day.

57 This word occurs several times with ironic effect: in "'Ministers of Grace'", "in response to the scandalized shouts of his opponents" (p.221); twice in "The Remoulding of Groby Lington", "the servants [...] were scandalized to find" (p.226) and "'worse was to follow', as she remarked [...] to a scandalized audience" (p.227); in "Laura", "'I think she might at least have waited till the funeral was over', said Amanda in a scandalized voice" (p.244); and in "The Wolves of Cernogratz": "'it was an impertinence,' snapped out the Baron, his protruding eyes taking on a scandalized expression" (p.411). In each case it is the superficial, trite response which is being mocked.

58 Just as no man is a hero to his valet.

59 *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, p.45.

60 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Penguin, 1982), p.51.

Chapter 4

"THE REALMS OF FICTION"

The chapter entitled "Inexorable Child-Logic" shows Saki's children displaying a wisdom beyond their years in order to highlight the stupidity and lack of imagination of their elders. In "The Domain of Miracle" the supernatural is the instrument which overthrows the accepted order, lack of perception being punished in proportion to its enormity. If these are improbable means of unveiling the underlying truths, then even more surprising and ironic are the tricks Saki employs in this next group of stories. In this chapter, which deals with practical jokes and lies with a purpose, Saki wields his most celebrated and arguably his most powerful weapon in the war against complacency and fatuity.

There are certain key factors which ensure the success of the lie or joke. They are: glibness, particularly evident in the out-talking stories; inventiveness which applies equally to the liars and the jokers; a delight in the outrageous; a fantastical imagination and the ability to turn the tables by quick thinking; again elements which recur throughout the stories. Coupled with these traits is the belief that "if a lie was worth telling it was worth telling well" (p.331) as Clovis says in "The Forbidden Buzzards", thoroughness and attention to detail appearing to be the keynotes.

"Talking-Out"

An "ability to talk out time" as Cobley¹ expresses it, is a feature not exclusive to Reginald,² though he is the earliest and most obvious exponent, but a characteristic of Clovis also. In "The Talking-Out of Tarrington", for instance, in which he heads off a bore, Clovis congratulates himself: 'I shall certainly go in for a Parliamentary career' [...], as he turned complacently to rejoin his aunt. 'As a talker-out of inconvenient bills I should be invaluable'" (p.193), a neat gibe at politicians. In

similar vein "Clovis on Parental Responsibilities" demonstrates his glibness in talking another bore to a standstill. In this case, Marion Eggelby is bent on discussing her children and, needless to say, the subject of children is hardly mentioned by Clovis, the whole tenor of his discourse being wickedly irresponsible and calculated to scandalize. It is a very good example of what one *Spectator* article would describe as a "handbook of the gentle art of dealing faithfully with social nuisances".³

The two stories have in common a series of deliberate misunderstandings which give rise to wild digressions designed to shock. In "The Talking-Out of Tarrington", Clovis begins the unequal contest with "a 'silent upon-a -peak-in-Darien' stare"(p.191).⁴ He is rude on the subject of Tarrington's moustache, and dismissive about his name which he suggests would suit a pet owl. By this time Tarrington, "pale but still resolute" (p.191) in his determination to be invited to the prestigious picnic given by Clovis's aunt, insists that he met Clovis "'at luncheon at your aunt's house once'" (p.191). Clovis, however, denies the possibility of this since "'she belongs to the National Anti-Luncheon League'" (p.192). The story concludes after a further sally from Clovis with Tarrington retiring defeated from the field "with the reflection that a picnic which included the presence of Clovis might prove a doubtfully agreeable experience" (pp.192-93).

Similarly, in "Clovis on Parental Responsibilities," Marion Eggelby who starts out insisting, "'You would like Eric'" (p.337), ends up responding to Clovis's cheerful and ambiguous, "'I quite look forward to meeting him some day'" (p.339), with a suppressed, "'I'll take care that you never shall!'" (p.339).

Perhaps the most celebrated of all the out-talking stories is "A Defensive Diamond" in which the lie is elevated to an art form. Treddleford is spending a dismal wet October evening comfortably

in his armchair before a blazing fire in his club with a favourite book, the ultimate in escapist literature: *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*. There intrudes upon this idyll, "Amblecope, the man with the restless, prominent eyes and the mouth ready mobilized for conversational openings" (p.354), a description which leaves no doubt that he is a compulsive talker, the sort of person to be avoided at all costs.⁵

Amblecope sits near him and "turning his large challenging eyes on Treddleford" (p.355) plunges into discussion of the Grand Prix which Treddleford successfully cuts short. Undeterred, Amblecope becomes "spuriously interested in the picture of a Mongolian pheasant" (p.355) and proceeds to recount a boastful shooting story. Before he can fairly launch himself, Treddleford counters with a tale of his own about "'my aunt, who owns the greater part of Lincolnshire'" (p.355), a story which is so wildly improbable that it evokes a snappish response from Amblecope. But Treddleford is in command. "'The story rests on my aunt's authority', said Treddleford coldly, 'and she is local vice-president of the Young Women's Christian Association'" (p.356), a guarantee of respectability equal to that of being a Justice of the Peace in "Gabriel-Ernest" or "The Hedgehog".

Still undaunted, Amblecope begins a fishing story but no sooner has he started than Treddleford again takes over with an amazing tale about his "'uncle, the Bishop of Southmolton'" (p.356) (the better-connected he can claim to be the more he can confound Amblecope who, like most bores, is also a fearful snob) which involves a van-load of blotting-paper toppling over a bridge into a pool, sucking up all the water and allowing his uncle to walk down and collect a giant trout which is thus left high and dry. The response to this flight of fancy is "silence for nearly half a minute" (p.356) before Amblecope "in a rather tired and dispirited voice" (p.356) starts reminiscing about

motor accidents, inevitably capped by Treddleford who, scenting victory, describes his sister's "'sensational carriage accident'" (p.356) involving two camels mounting Lady Nineveh's grand staircase. This proves too much for Amblecope who removes his unwanted presence at last, leaving Treddleford to the peaceful resumption of his book.

The *coup-de-grâce* is delivered in the last sentence by Treddleford as his path and Amblecope's converge at the door of the room. "'I believe I take precedence,' he said coldly; 'you are merely the club Bore; I am the club Liar.'" (p.358). Here is plenty of evidence to support Clovis's belief that "if a lie was worth telling it was worth telling well." In this story there are also all the essential ingredients to be found in the practical jokes too: glibness in out-talking, inventiveness, outrageous lies told to shock, fantasy in abundance and turning the tables.

In "Mark", the author Augustus Mellowkent learns how to harness fiction for his own purposes in much the same way as in "A Defensive Diamond", "The Talking-Out of Tarrington" and the rest. He has adopted the name Mark on the advice of his publisher since Mark, "'besides being alliterative, conjures up a vision of some one strong and beautiful and good, a sort of blend of Georges Carpentier⁶ and the reverend What's-his-name'" (p.470) and it is in assuming this new persona that he turns "a spirit of wistful emulation" (p.472) to good account.

The kind of banal fiction that Mark writes is demonstrated by such trite excerpts as the description of the young girl's attraction to the postman, where "'their eyes met, for the merest fraction of a second, yet nothing could ever be quite the same again'" (p.471). In resolving to "'break the intolerable, unreal silence'" (p.471) she asks with appalling bathos, "'How is your mother's rheumatism?'" (p.471). The interruption of the salesman, Caiaphas Dwelf, is an obvious annoyance to Mellowkent

as he writes his latest novel, though it is his indecisiveness which allows it. "The importance of the visitor's mission was probably illusory, but he had never met any one with the name Caiaphas before" (p.471). Saki tempts the reader to wonder if he had ever met anyone called Dwelf.⁷

Like Amblecope and the rest, Dwelf's "cold grey eyes, and determined manner bespoke an unflinching purpose" (p.471) as he proceeds to try selling the author an encyclopaedia, turning Mellowkent's every objection to his advantage. Caiaphas is humourless and impervious to all Mark's attempts to sidetrack him, ignoring even a direct request to leave.

It is at this point that Mark has his "sudden inspiration" (p.473), a turning point equal to that of Eshley in "The Stalled Ox".⁸ He uses the salesman's own ploy by offering to sell him some of his novels and quoting from them extensively as an incentive. Caiaphas interrupts "with a tired note sounding in his voice for the first time" (p.473) just like Amblecope's "rather tired and dispirited voice". But Mark presses home his advantage by reading from *The Reluctance of Lady Cullumpton* (p.473)⁹ despite Caiaphas's reiteration "'I don't read novels'" (p.473). Just like Amblecope in "A Defensive Diamond", he retires defeated. "With a muttered remark about having no time to waste on monkey-talk" (p.474) he ignores the triumphant Mark's "cheerful 'Good morning'" (p.474). Mark "fancied that a look of respectful hatred flickered in the cold, grey eyes" (p.474), again, as in so many of the stories, eyes either concealing or revealing underlying feelings. Mark resembles Treddleford in "A Defensive Diamond" in having turned the tables on an unwelcome intruder in a manner which will permanently enhance his future standing. Treddleford will never again have to endure the club Bore and Mark has gained a new self-respect.

"Adventurer Purse-Sappers"

Those who lie in order to make a living, called by Saki in "The Square Egg" "that great army of adventurer purse-sappers" (p.541) also abound. They are seldom successful, however, since their intended victims are generally more than a match for them. Take the example of "The Romancers" where Norton Crosby notes "out of the corner of his eye" (p.279) a figure who is clearly by his appearance a "professional cadger" (p.279). Part of the giveaway sign is "the furtive, evasive eye" (p.279)¹⁰ of the newcomer. The fact that Crosby has spotted him out of the corner of his eye says much about Crosby's character too.

Initially the newcomer "fixed his eyes straight in front of him in a strenuous unseeing gaze" (p.280) before embarking in wheedling tones on a series of attempts to elicit money from Crosby. But he is thwarted at every turn, Crosby "making an excursion himself into the realms of fiction" (p.280) whenever necessary. Despite several temporary defeats one of which results in a "bewildered silence for a moment" (p.280),¹¹ the cadger doggedly pursues his course. The realms of Crosby's fantasy range from Persia, through "'the story of Ibrahim and the eleven camel-loads of blotting-paper'" (p.281)¹² to "'Yom [...] which is in Southern Afghanistan'" (p.281). Crosby is not engaged merely in parrying, he is actively leading the cadger on, raising his hopes until "the listener's eyes were glittering" (p.282). But his hopes are short-lived and the cadger is left muttering to himself in much the same way as the routed Caiaphas Dwelf, "'I don't believe a word of his story [...] pack of nasty lies from beginning to end'" (p.283). As Saki ironically sums up, "two of a trade never agree" (p.283).

In "Dusk" another character with a curiously similar name, Norman Gortsby, is joined on a park bench by a young man who claims that he is penniless, having left his money together with his possessions in an elusive hotel which he left in order to buy some soap. Gortsby, like Crosby, responds initially in a

manner which encourages optimism, by saying that he has had a similar experience himself but then adds, "'the weak point of your story is that you can't produce the soap'" (p.300). The young man pretends to a frantic and futile search for it. "'I must have lost it,' he muttered angrily" (p.300), the anger because his bluff has been called.

Gortsby's Wildean¹³ remark "'To lose an hotel and a cake of soap on one afternoon suggests wilful carelessness'" (p.300) pursues him as he disappears from view.

Gortsby's complacent reflection that it was a pity that he could not produce the soap, since "in his particular line genius certainly consists of an infinite capacity for taking precautions" (p.300) (thoroughness in fabrication again being emphasised in the surprise substitution of the word "precautions") is interrupted by his catching sight of a bar of soap lying beside the bench. He jumps to the conclusion that "it had evidently fallen out of the youth's overcoat pocket" (p.300), 'evidently' again having ironic force, and he rushes after him to tell him that "'the important witness to the genuineness of your story has turned up'" (p.301). In his own defence he adds, "'You must excuse my disbelief, but appearances were really rather against you'" (p.301) and he offers to lend him a sovereign which the youth accepts with a show of emotion which Gortsby erroneously attributes to relief. It is, of course, suppressed mirth at the happy coincidence which has provided the circumstantial evidence he needed. The soap has been lost by the previous occupant of the park bench, as the last sentence reveals to Gortsby.

Yet another twist to this theme is provided by "A Shot in the Dark"¹⁴ in which the cadging youth turns out to be just who he claims to be with embarrassing consequences to Sletherby who is seeking the sponsorship of the youth's mother in a forthcoming parliamentary election.

Women seem to be more successful purse-sappers than men, as "A Holiday Task" shows. Kenelm Jerton, with a morbid self-consciousness to equal that of Theodoric Voler in "The Mouse", is picked out by a "Lady" in a hotel restaurant. Using the device of selective amnesia she lunches extravagantly, organises Kenelm to look through back numbers of a magazine for traces of her identity, and gambles ten pounds on a horse, before borrowing money from him to pay her cab fares and hotel bill, and leaving him in charge of luggage which she "had to invent" (p.341), for reasons of respectability, and which belongs to someone else. She turns out to be a "Lady Champion at golf" (p.344) - a justification for her recollection that she is "Lady Somebody" (p.340) - who has a habit of losing her memory from time to time and becomes furious "if you make any allusion to it afterwards" (p.344) thereby ensuring that any money owing will remain unpaid.

Another cunning woman exploits a feeble man in "The Name-Day", a story in which the timid J.J. Abbleway, is snowbound in a train between Austria and Croatia. His plight is shared by an imperturbable peasant woman with an eye to the main chance who capitalises on his fears by selling him food at extortionate prices. As she points out "with relentless logic" (p.370) (a quality shared by Saki's children) there is no cheaper food to be had on the train. She does nothing to allay his fears, fuelling them indeed by the dispassionate relating of past mischances befalling travellers in similar circumstances, and claiming immunity from harm herself since "'it is the day of Saint Mariä Kleophä, my name-day'" (p.369).

As he gazes fearfully out of the window he sees what he believes to be wolves, and the peasant woman does not disabuse him. "'There are hundreds of them,' whispered Abbleway [...]. We shall be devoured'" (p.370), but the peasant woman merely replies, "'Not me, on my name-day'" (p.370). "The long torture-laden minutes passed slowly away" (p.371)¹⁵ until to his horror

the woman leaves the train to what the squeamish Ableway believes to be her certain death from wolves as "two gaunt lean figures rushed upon her from the forest" (p.371).¹⁶ He hides his face not wanting "to see a human being torn to pieces and devoured before his eyes" (p.371). But this cowardly feeling is replaced by "a new sensation of scandalized astonishment" (p.371) when he sees the wolves gambolling playfully about her, and realises he has been duped, that the 'wolves' are in fact dogs. This rational explanation while humiliating is nevertheless a great relief to him since "he was not prepared to be the witness of a miracle" (p.371) in which respect he much resembles the unimaginative van Cheele, Sylvia Seltoun and the rest.¹⁷

"Invent Something"

If J.J. Ableway and his like wish the even tenor of their lives to remain undisturbed, it is a craving for something truly exciting to happen which is Blenkinthrope's undoing in "The Seventh Pullet". A desire to be found interesting motivates him to enlist the help of a fellow commuter in making up entertaining stories. Initially reluctant to "'invent something'" (p.288) as instructed by the Mephistophelean Gorworth,¹⁸ Blenkinthrope nevertheless succumbs to the temptation to spin a fantastic yarn, having pictured himself "telling it in the train amid the absorbed interest of his fellow-passengers" (p.289) and goaded by the equally unlikely tales of the others. The "wistfulness" (p.289)¹⁹ gives way to an embellished version of Gorworth's story.²⁰

His temporary limelight is eclipsed, however, by "Smith-Paddon, a daily fellow-traveller, whose little girl had been knocked down and nearly hurt by a car belonging to a musical-comedy actress" (p.290). The fact that the actress was absent at the time in no way diminishes Smith-Paddon's celebrity and says much about the empty lives of these sensation-mongers. Blenkinthrope's next excursion into the realms of fantasy is so incredible as to accredit him thereafter with being "the Munchausen of the party" (pp.291-92).

If this newfound glory has its rewards it also carries a bitter punishment. The only truly sensational event of his humdrum life occurs when his wife of whom he "had been genuinely fond" (p.292), dies instantly upon the successful completion of "'the Death's Head patience'" (p.292) which has already caused the sudden death of her mother and great-great aunt before her. "In the midst of his bereavement one dominant thought obtruded itself. Something sensational and real had at last come into his life" (p.292) and for this fatal lack of a sense of proper values he is punished by universal disbelief and condemnation as "'Not the right thing to be Munchausening in a time of sorrow'" (p.293).²¹

In "The Seventh Pullet" Blenkinthrope requires to be coached in the art of Munchausening. Not so the Baroness in "Esmé" as she recounts her hunting story to Clovis.²² At first all the hallmarks of a typical hunting story are there. As Clovis remarks, "'In every fox-hunting story that I've ever heard there's been a fox and some gorse-bushes'" (p.102).²³ But not for long, for the Baroness, unperturbed by this interruption, continues her tale which reflects poorly on her stultifying companion, Constance Broddle, whose main contribution is a series of asinine questions. An extraordinary wild beast comes into view, identified by the Baroness as a hyena which has probably escaped from Lord Pabham's Park.

The hounds in pursuit of this unlikely quarry behave as ineptly as the hounds in "The Lost Sanjak"²⁴ and disappear leaving Constance and the Baroness alone in the gloaming with the hyena. To Constance's remark that they cannot spend all night with the hyena, the Baroness acidly retorts, "'I don't know what your ideas of comfort are [...] but I shouldn't think of staying here all night even without a hyaena'" (p.103), deliberately misunderstanding the plodding Constance who is clearly no match for her. They trot off towards "the Crowley road" (p.103)²⁵ followed by the hyena whom the Baroness dubs Esmé as a

convenient name for a beast of indeterminate gender, on their way passing a gipsy child who is devoured by Esmé despite attempts to stop it. Without any evidence of genuine upset, the Baroness says, "'This part of the story I always hurry over, because it is really rather horrible'" (p.104).

The doltish Constance with "another of her futile questions" (p.104) asks, "'How can you let that ravening beast²⁶ trot by your side?'" (p.104) as if she herself is somehow exempt from all blame. When they reach the road, Esmé is promptly knocked down by a passing motorist, whereupon the Baroness affects grief and requests that he bury the hyena at once. "'Evidently hasty roadside interments were contingencies that had been provided against'" (p.105), remarks the Baroness sardonically to Clovis in her narration of events.

Playing on the young man's obvious contrition, she refuses offers of reparation, "'but as he persisted I let him have my address'" (p.105), this deviousness netting her "'a charming little diamond brooch, with the name Esmé set in a sprig of rosemary'" (p. 105). The unsentimental Baroness promptly sells it, refusing to share any of the proceeds with Constance, whose friendship she forfeits without regret.

There are no repercussions either from Lord Pabham who "'never advertised the loss of his hyaena'" (p.105), having had to pay compensation for sheep-worrying and poultry-thieving when a herbivorous animal escaped two years previously; or from the gipsies who "'were equally unobtrusive over their missing offspring'" (p.105). As the Baroness cynically remarks, "'I don't suppose in large encampments they really know to a child or two how many they've got'" (p.105).

Clovis more than matches this wild tale in "The Story of St Vespallus", a fable in satirical vein told in answer to a plea from the Baroness for a story "'just true enough to be

interesting and not true enough to be tiresome'" (p.166). The hero very much resembles Clovis in being '"not at all displeased at the attention which was being centred on him" (p.170) as well as in the description of his physical appearance. "He had an elegant, well-knit figure, a healthy complexion, eyes the colour of very ripe mulberries and dark hair, smooth and very well cared for"' (p. 168) which, the Baroness observes, "'sounds like a description of what you imagine yourself to have been like at the age of sixteen'" (p.168).

The story hinges on the defection of Vespaluus from Pagan to Christian worship and the punishment devised for him. The evil-tempered King Hkrikros, whose heir he is, decrees that he is to be slung naked over three beehives and stung to death, "'a most elegant death'" (p.169) as the obsequious Librarian remarks. Conveniently for Vespaluus, the royal beekeeper, himself a Christian sympathiser and fond of the boy, painstakingly removes all the bee stings so that Vespaluus emerges unscathed from his ordeal and is acclaimed a saint because of this "publicly-witnessed miracle" (p.171). If the Baroness is superior in intelligence to the prosaic Constance in "Esmé", Clovis is clearly smarter than the Baroness, as her interjection, "'I didn't know you could take the sting from a live bee"' (p. 170) would seem to indicate. The final irony of the story is that Vespaluus has remained Pagan throughout, pretending to be Christian to annoy his Uncle Hkrikros, which is why, says Clovis, "in spite of the popular veneration for his sanctity, he never received official canonization" (p.173).

Ingenious torture in this case fails and the unwholesome Vespaluus triumphs over the followers of conventionally accepted forms of religion. The fable satirises, as so many of the stories do, the hollowness at the heart of religious beliefs, the petty corruptions beneath the outward show. Here again is fantasy, glibness, shock and inventiveness, and Clovis has proved himself to be the equal in Munchausening to the Baroness.

"Shock Tactics"

From these tall stories it is but a short step to the hoaxes for which Saki is celebrated. The earliest practical joke, which appears to be more the effect of high spirits than the later, more purposeful tricks played by Clovis and the rest, occurs in "Reginald's Choir Treat". A vicar's daughter, with the approval of Reginald's family, has been trying to reform him, but the earnest Amabel²⁷ is no match for the flippant young man who plays mercilessly upon her serious intentions.

She is sufficiently unimaginative to suggest that he help her to organise the choir boys' annual outing whereupon "his eyes shone with the dangerous enthusiasm of a convert" (p.17), which conveys to the reader a sense of anticipation and ought to have warned the ingenuous Amabel. When she is indisposed with a chill, "Reginald called it a dispensation; it had been the dream of his life to stage-manage a choir outing" (p.18). He is both calculating and an inspired opportunist, a combination reminiscent of Nicholas in "The Lumber-Room". He leads his young charges to a stream to bathe and refuses to return their clothes to them.²⁸ Then he insists on their processing thus unclad through the village to a musical accompaniment. "Forethought had provided the occasion with a supply of tin whistles, but the introduction of a he-goat [...] was a brilliant afterthought" (p.18). For this "Bacchanalian procession" (p.18) he chooses a deliberately inappropriate temperance hymn, the temperance movement being a familiar target for Reginald's pranks.

While Reginald may have enjoyed the temporary indulgence of his sense of fun, remaining "discreetly in the background" (p. 18) does not protect him. His "family never forgave him. They had no sense of humour" (p.18). He must, however, have considered it worth the cost for, irrepressible as ever in "Reginald's Christmas Revel", he livens up a tedious Christmas party in a

manner calculated to give maximum offence and resulting in his banishment from the Babwolds' house-party on Boxing Day.²⁹

Having created minor havoc in a succession of incidents throughout the evening, Reginald "invented a headache and retired from the scene" (p.34). A fellow guest, the redoubtable "Miss Langshan-Smith [...] who always got up at some uncomfortable hour in the morning" (p.34), has pinned to her door "a signed request" (p.34) that she be called early in the morning. Just as he saw the possibilities of the choir outing, Reginald sees this as equally providential. "Such an opportunity does not come twice in a lifetime" (p.35) Reginald observes and covers up the message with a suicide note expressing regret for "a misspent life" (p.35) and requesting "a military funeral" (p.35). Preposterous though this is, when, "a few minutes later I violently exploded an air-filled paper bag on the landing, and gave a stage moan that could have been heard in the cellars" (p.35), the house guests charge upstairs while Reginald effects his retreat. The picture which Saki paints of the formidable spinster being "searched [. . .] for bullets for about a quarter of an hour, as if she had been a historic battlefield" (p.35) is typically and gloriously absurd.

Markedly similar is the culminating jape perpetrated by Adrian in the eponymous story. Despite Lucas Croyden's warnings to his aunt, Susan Mebberley, who "was a charming woman, but she was also an aunt" (p.141) not to take Adrian under her wing, Lucas realises that she will ignore the advice because she "was a woman as well as an aunt" (p.142). The escalation of Adrian's escapades is reflected in the letters from progressively more remote hotels in the Swiss Alps, sent by Clovis who, conveniently, is one of the party. As he relates, "'nothing unduly outrageous happened till last night'" (p.143) when Adrian changes over all the numbers on the bedroom doors and

"'transferred the bathroom label to the adjoining bedroom door" (p.143) with predictable results.³⁰

In this story of irrepressible high spirits Susan Mebberley certainly learns the hard way that she should have listened to Lucas, and yet the flavour of the story is more the celebration of youthful irresponsibility than a sophisticated practical joke or some well-laid stratagem. In the case of "The Boar-Pig", however, a new element is introduced.

Of the practical jokes designed to punish, as usual there are two main targets, the bossy or manipulative woman and the weak or stupid man. A prime example of the former is Mrs Stossen in "The Boar-Pig" who, with her dull daughter, is bent on gate-crashing a garden party at which "the Princess" (p.246)³¹ is to be present. They reckon without the thirteen year-old daughter of the house, Matilda Cuvering, however, who first releases a boar-pig which blocks their retreat and then engages them to their discomfiture in French until, after extorting a suitable ransom, she lures the pig away so that they can make their escape.³² Matilda, reminiscent of her namesake in Belloc's poem,³³ appears only in this story³⁴ but has close affinities with Vera who, either generically, or specifically as Vera Durmot visiting a long succession of aunts,³⁵ acts in a manner worthy of Clovis to unsettle the complacent or disconcert the pretentious.

Despite the Stossen's "furtive haste mingled with the stateliness of their advance" (p.246) past the walled gooseberry garden,³⁶ "the alert eyes" (p.246) of Matilda who is perched in her medlar tree detect their progress and she releases the pig which regards them impassively from "small red eyes" (p.247) to their great consternation. They make shooing noises which evoke the comment from the hitherto unobserved Matilda, "'if they think they're going to drive him away by reciting lists of the kings of Israel and Judah³⁷ they're laying themselves out for

disappointment'" (p. 247). As with all of Saki's juvenile protagonists Matilda is superior to the adults on several levels. She is literally superior in her position above them looking down,³⁸ she is able to direct events, and she is clearly cleverer and better educated too. Having forced them to reveal an ineptitude in French, and, despite their extreme reluctance, to part with money, she proceeds to lure the pig away with an ease which compounds their feeling of foolishness. The loss to their dignity is considerable.

Blackmail worked wonders for Matilda and blackmail is Mrs Heasant's reward in "Shock Tactics" too. Bertie Heasant's mother is "one of those empty-minded individuals to whom other people's affairs are perpetually interesting" (p. 497) to the extent that she opens her son's private correspondence. Bertie confides his problem to Clovis who writes a series of letters each more improbable and incriminating than the last, which the sensation-loving Mrs Heasant believes implicitly despite all Bertie's protests of innocence. When she discovers "'it's all been a stupid hoax'" (p. 499), she promises never to open his mail again, "willing to pay hush-money" (p. 499) in being "conscious of the fact that she would look rather ridiculous if the story got about" (p. 499). Again it is an appeal to social rather than ethical considerations which prevails.

In "The Schartz-Metterklume Method", called by Fogle, "Saki's most famous practical joke",³⁹ the unusual element is the age and standing of the joker, the mature yet high-spirited Lady Carlotta, who, though clearly a woman with a mind of her own, has a sense of humour to temper her imperiousness.⁴⁰ She has shown herself to be a right-minded person by her intervention on behalf of a maltreated animal, which is the reason for her having missed her train. In being accused by the upstart Mrs Quabarl of being "'Miss Hope, the governess'", Lady Carlotta agrees, "'Very well, if I must I must' [...] with dangerous meekness" (p. 284).⁴¹

Mrs Quabarl continues to play into Lady Carlotta's hands at every turn by her pretentiousness and insistence that "'in their history lessons, for instance, you must try to make them feel that they are being introduced to the life-stories of men and women who really lived'" (p.284); so that when she finds her children being required to re-enact the Rape of the Sabine Women she has only herself to blame. Mr Quabarl is merely an echo of his domineering wife (like Egbert in "The Reticence of Lady Anne"), and no match for Lady Carlotta in her deliberate misunderstandings and opinions designed to shock.

Forced to intervene on behalf of her beleaguered offspring Mrs Quabarl is reduced to the acid observation, "'You may be very clever and modern, Miss Hope [...] but I should like you to leave here by the next train'" (p.287). But Lady Carlotta has yet one more card to play, informing Mrs Quabarl that she would be grateful if that lady would take care of her (imaginary) luggage for her - luggage which in typical Saki fashion includes a half-grown leopard cub. The irony throughout this story is that the putative Miss Hope in the subservient role of governess is plainly superior in every way to Mrs Quabarl, her supposed employer, and this reversal of the accepted order of things draws attention to the essentially inferior nature of the Quabarls and their bogus gentility.

Occasionally a trick is played in self-defence as in "Fate" where Rex Dillot is in an impossibly tight spot having gambled money which he hasn't got on a billiard game which is heading for disaster. He deliberately sets fire to the bedding of the overbearing Teresa Thundleford who is having a post-prandial nap, so that he can bundle her up, rush to the billiard room, and deposit her unceremoniously on the billiard table. "The promptitude and energy of the rescue had prevented any great damage being done [...] The billiard table had suffered most" (p.487). As the incorrigible and loyal Clovis says in Rex's defence, "When one is rushing about with a blazing woman in

one's arms one can't stop to think out exactly where one is going to put her" (p.487), the irony being, of course, that only Clovis has seen through the ruse.

Clovis uses a trick in his own interests in "The Stampeding of Lady Bastable". His mother has used all her wiles on the intractable Lady Bastable to persuade her to put Clovis up for the six days Mrs Sangrail intends to spend visiting the MacGregors, presumably in Scotland. She will thereby save his train fare and have a few days' respite from his unpredictable behaviour. The "sleepy comfortable voice" (p.119) which she generally uses to lull people into thinking that what she is asking is of little consequence has no effect on Lady Bastable, who recalls the time that Clovis stayed with her for a week. To his mother's protest that "'he was younger then'" (p.119) his hostess retorts, "'But he hasn't improved [...] it's no use growing older if you only learn new ways of misbehaving yourself'" (p.119).⁴³

Bribery prevails, however, where wheedling has failed and Clovis is presented with a *fait accompli* when he comes down to breakfast. Responding to the news that he has been invited to stay on at Lady Bastable's he "said suitable things in a highly unsuitable manner" (p.119) which contrasts with his usual trick of saying shocking things in a polite way.

His mother watches him covertly "from behind ostentatiously sleepy lids" (p.120) masking her anxiety about his reactions. She has not long to wait. No sooner has she gone upstairs to oversee her packing and Lady Bastable is ensconced in the morning-room than Clovis rushes into the kitchen shouting randomly, "'Poor Lady Bastable! In the morning-room! Oh, quick!'" (p.120), and the startled servants in pell-mell procession dash off, the rear being brought up by a gardener with a sickle in his hand which adds to the effectiveness of the trick. This rabble then, led by Clovis shouting absurdly, "'The

jacquerie!⁴⁴ They're on us!'" (p.120), plunges through the morning-room towards Lady Bastable, who bolts in terror out of the french window and runs "well and far across the lawn before the eyes of her astonished retainers" (p.121). Naturally this complete loss of face does not render Clovis dear to her and the lunch "was served in a frigid stateliness that might have been framed on a Byzantine model" (p.121).⁴⁵ Clovis by his wild hoax gets his own way and profits from teaching the MacGregor boys "who could well afford the knowledge, how to play poker-patience" (p.120).

He plays a similar trick in "The Hen". When Mrs Sangrail invites Dora Bittholz to stay, Clovis points out that Jane Martlet's visit will overlap since she is renowned for overstaying her allotted time. Unfortunately "a hen came between them" (p.255)⁴⁶ and Clovis feels that the problem is not so much that they are not on speaking terms but "'on the contrary, the difficulty will be to get them to leave off'" (p.255), a fine example of "partial expression".⁴⁷ "'Nothing short of a miracle would make Jane leave'" (p 255) before her fortnight is up, laments Clovis's mother to which Clovis replies with justification, "'Miracles are rather in my line'" (p.255).

But this particular miracle seems destined for failure since every ruse Clovis tries is met with a stolid refusal to be dislodged. Even being told that Sturridge, the butler, is intent on murdering her merely causes her to remark, "'It's a dreadful situation to be in, with a mad butler dangling over you like the sword of What's-his-name⁴⁸, but I'm certainly not going to cut my visit short'" (p.258), an unconscious pun which underlines her obtuseness. It inspires Clovis, however, to ask Sturridge to carry a ceremonial sword into the morning-room where Jane is writing letters, telling him that she wants to copy the inscription on the hilt. The recent conversation with Clovis combined with the sight of the armed butler advancing towards her is enough to cause even Jane to flee.

The miracle proves unnecessary in the event since Dora postpones her visit but it is some consolation to Clovis to have the distinction of holding "the record as the only human being who ever hustled Jane Martlet out of the time-table of her migrations" (p.259),⁴⁹ an achievement possibly on a par with the Guild of the Poor Dear Souls and their nearly reforming a washerwoman in "Reginald's Drama" (p.29). To Clovis and his like in any case, it is the excitement of the chase that matters.

In "Excepting Mrs Pentherby", a story which Inglis suggests "no hostess should be without"⁵⁰ Reggie Bruttle appears to attain the impossible too. He has inherited a house which "might easily languish in the estate market for years, set round with notice-boards proclaiming it, in the eyes of a sceptical world to be an eminently desirable residence" (p.466) as Saki remarks with cynical insight. Reggie thinks, however, that "good management and a little unobtrusive hard work" (p.466) will ensure the success of the prolonged house-party "consisting of young or youngish people of both sexes, too poor to be able to do much hunting or shooting on a serious scale" (p.466) but with ambitions to do so. He proposes that each should be "on the footing" (p.466) not of "paying guest" but "paying host" (p.466).

This shows a marked understanding of human nature, and the warning by Major Dagberry that his scheme will fail on the grounds that a woman will "'go without things to a heroic extent, but the one luxury she will not go without is her quarrels'" (p.466) proves unfounded. Mrs Pentherby who "exposed little weaknesses" (p.467) and who "did, and said, horrible things in a matter-of-fact innocent way, and [...] did, and said, matter-of-fact innocent things in a horrible way" (pp.467-68),⁵¹ contrives to unite the forces of hatred against her own person.

The cunning Reggie has introduced her "for the express purpose

of concentrating the feuds and quarrelling" (p.469), a role which suited her perfectly as an antidote to being the "poor relation in a rather pugnacious family [whose] life has been largely spent in smoothing over other people's quarrels" (p.470). As a student of human nature Reggie ranks with Clovis and Vera, his "good management" and "unobtrusive hard work" guaranteeing the success of his ploy and fulfilling the requirements of ingenuity and thoroughness.

Another of Clovis's miracles occurs in "The She-Wolf". As in so many other stories, the lack of thoroughness is seen to be the justification for the victim's downfall. In "The Lost Sanjak", for instance, it is "lack of specialisation" that is regretted, in "Dusk" it is the want of a piece of soap. It is for "his dabbings in the unseen" (p.235) that Leonard Bilsiter is to be punished, both on account of the presumption he betrays (a quality shared by Mrs De Ropp, Sylvia Seltoun and Thirza Yealnton among others) and in his superficiality, a trait which is universally deplored in Saki's stories.

Added to Leonard's fatal sense of self-importance which makes him "oppressively reticent"⁵² about certain dark mysteries, which he alluded to under the resounding title of "Siberian Magic" (p.236) when he is normally "garrulous" (p.236),⁵³ there is the further irritation of "his aunt, Cecilia Hoops, who loved sensation perhaps rather better than she loved the truth" (p.236).⁵⁴ This weakness of hers which again is prevalent throughout the stories contributes significantly to his downfall.

As Saki ironically observes, Leonard's reputation "as a wonder-worker or a charlatan" (p.236) has preceded him to Mary Hampton's house-party where he is a guest. This party comprises the usual social mix: Colonel Hampton who is typically obtuse and choleric, the earnest Mavis Pellington, the foolish Mrs Hoops, and Clovis, but with the interesting addition of Lord Pabham who owns a menagerie,⁵⁵ and the sporting hostess.

Although to a degree the reader is privy to the practical joke, the pleasure in the story is not thereby diminished, Clovis's masterly ingenuity and the reactions of the guests more than compensating for any lack of surprise element. In claiming for himself miraculous powers with the vociferous backing of his aunt, Leonard prompts his hostess to say, "'I wish you would turn me into a wolf, Mr Bilsiter'" (p.236). The astonished response from her husband, "'I never knew you had a craving in that direction'" (p.236), neatly divides the company into the knowing and the gullible which is consistent with what is to follow.

Leonard, in order to protect himself from exposure as a fraud, adopts a lofty moral stance which is to be his undoing. "'In our present imperfect understanding of these hidden forces I think one should approach them with humbleness rather than mockery'" (p.237) he intones.⁵⁶ The fact that Clovis "had sat unusually silent during the discussion on the possibilities of Siberian magic" (p.237) is a clear warning that he is formulating a plan.

With the help of Lord Pabham who is to provide a she-wolf by the name of Louisa, Clovis is going to substitute the animal for his hostess after dinner the following day. Leonard's aunt unwittingly provides the perfect opening. Not content with listening to Leonard expatiating about his command "of unseen forces and untested powers" (pp.237-38), "her sensation-loving soul hankered after something more dramatic than mere vocal demonstration" (p.238) and she implores him to "'do something to convince them of your powers'" (p.238).

Taking this as her cue, Mary Hampton goes into the conservatory to feed her macaws and as she disappears from view dares Leonard to turn her into a wolf. In true supernatural style, "a breath of chill air seemed to rush across the room, and at the same time the macaws broke forth into ear-splitting screams" (p.238), the natural explanation for which becomes clear later. As Lord

Pabham's wolf emerges, consternation understandably ensues, and Leonard's protests that he cannot remedy the situation and his disavowal of all responsibility for Mary's transformation into a wolf do nothing to calm the situation.

Clovis as usual appears to dwell on the least important aspect of the crisis while yet managing to take maximum advantage of it. "'Of course we must accept your assurance that you didn't turn Mrs Hampton into a wolf', said Clovis politely, 'but you will agree that appearances are against you'" (p.239).⁵⁷ After a suitable interval Lord Pabham lures Louisa out of the room by tossing a lump of sugar to her,⁵⁸ and the assembled throng in expectation of further sensational revelations dashes to the conservatory to see if there are any traces of Mary Hampton.

"'The door is locked on the inside!'" (p.240) exclaims Clovis, having locked it as he speaks. Thus the inrush of cold air before the emergence of the wolf from the conservatory is explained, the wolf obviously having been introduced by that door, to the understandable alarm of the macaws. There follows a ludicrous discussion about the proprieties of being "chaperoned by a wolf" (p.240) until Mary Hampton's abrupt reappearance on the scene, complaining, "'Some one has mesmerized me [...]; I found myself in the game larder, of all places'" (p.240). Only Saki would have dreamt up so appropriate a location and the manner of drawing attention to it by the phrase, "of all places".⁵⁹ She continues, in a manner which shows her to be thoroughly in the Clovis mould, "'being fed with sugar by Lord Pabham. I hate being mesmerized, and the doctor has forbidden me to touch sugar'" (p.240), as if the two are of equal significance and on the same plane. Saki hereby casts doubt on the esoteric vogues of the day while adding to the absurdity of the situation. Her feigned belief in Leonard's magical powers elicits only another disconsolate disclaimer. And Clovis assumes that mantle for himself. Rubbing salt into

Leonard's wound he says, "'One does not care to speak about these strange powers, but once in a way, when one hears a lot of nonsense being talked about them, one is tempted to show what Siberian magic can accomplish in the hands of some one who really understands it'" (p.241). Never has a boastful, feeble man been so comprehensively routed. As Cheikin states in her interesting study, Saki uses practical jokes as a means of "demonstrating the incongruity of life, forcing it into the open where it must be seen and recognised."⁶⁰

It is love of sensation which gives rise to the practical joke perpetrated on Mr Scarrick's shoppers in "Quail Seed" too. In lamenting to his new tenants, an artist and his sister, that his suburban grocery business cannot compete with the fashionable London stores, he recruits unexpected allies. They advise him that, since he cannot give the customer something for nothing, he should "appeal to another instinct, which dominates not only the woman shopper but the male shopper - in fact, the entire human race" (pp.452-53).

When asked what that might be, the answer is given obliquely in the next paragraph. Mrs Greyes and Miss Fritten having missed the train to Town decide to do their shopping at Scarrick's. "It would not be sensational, they agreed, but it would still be shopping" (p.453). This is all the encouragement that the artist and his sister need to enact a fantastic melodrama which attracts customers from miles around. All manner of wild speculations are provoked concerning the significance of the quail seed and the jaffa oranges, the role of the bearded stranger and the foreign-looking youth, while Mr Scarrick's blatant lies evoke the bathetic response from one of the lady shoppers, "'I shall never again be able to believe what he tells me about the absence of colouring matter in the jam'" (p.455), which reveals something of her sense of values.

The eyewitness descriptions of the events and their participants are themselves so various as to be contradictory, saying more about the witnesses themselves than about the events witnessed. Much is made of eyes and appearances. The face of the mysterious boy is described as "masked with studied indifference, overspread with ghastly pallor, and blazing with defiance" (p.457). But there is universal agreement about the bearded stranger's "furtive pacing to and fro" (p.457) "always with his eyes turning to watch the shop entrance" (p.457), a picture of unease which recalls Sophie in "The Byzantine Omelette".

This appeal to the desire for the sensational has paid rich dividends to Mr Scarrick. It is a different kind of play-acting which takes place in "A Touch of Realism". In wanting "to have something really original this year" (p.301), Lady Blonze has invited the perfect assortment of guests to her Christmas house-party. One of them suggests a prolonged charade which results in a kind of cross between "Quail Seed" and "The Schartz-Metterklume Method." Representing the natural victims are the aptly named Blanche Boveal, whose suggestion is adopted as the house-party theme, the pushy but amiably *nouveau-riche* Klammersteins and the "physically soft and mentally peevish" (p.304) Waldo Plubley.

On the side of the jokers are Bertie van Tahn, Vera Durmot and the hitherto unknown Cyril Skatterly, who "has madness on one side of his family and a Hungarian grandmother on the other" (p.302). Lady Blonze's husband, Sir Nicholas, has misgivings about the whole affair but his wife overrules him, saying, "'I particularly want to have this idea carried out. It will be sure to be talked about a lot'" (p.303). Her husband's ambiguous reply, "'That is quite possible'" (p.303), is borne out at the end of the story when "Lady Blonze's Christmas party was talked about and written about to an extent that she had not anticipated in her most ambitious moments" (p.306), though

hardly in the way she desired. She has, of course, in common with all Saki's imperious women, only herself to blame for the outcome.

"Romance at Short Notice"

Vera acts in conjunction with Skatterly in "A Touch of Realism" but is even more formidable acting on her own initiative. That "extraordinary fantasia",⁶¹ "The Open Window", has been anatomised by Katrakis⁶² in demonstration of Saki's gift for brevity, but it is worthy of further analysis because it displays so many of the classic ingredients of a typical story in this practical joke category. The victim is a feeble man; the joker is Vera, a young girl who features in several of these stories representing the child with an adult perception; there is a hint of the supernatural; a dominant aunt figure; dialogue designed to delude and a surprise ending.

The opening sequence, as Katrakis points out, establishes a clear distinction between the "very self-possessed young lady of fifteen" (p.259) and the inept and nervous Framton Nuttel, who flounders around in a doomed attempt to be all things to all women. Sensing his acute uncertainty Vera mercilessly presses home her advantage. Under a cloak of polite conversation she establishes the limitations of his knowledge which allow her to play her trick on him. She is both instinctive and calculating in her approach to him, a characteristic common to feline creatures and typical of Saki's children. As Otto⁶³ points out, Vera with the apparent innocence of a child is a consummate liar.⁶⁴

"Do you know many of the people round here?" (p.260) she asks disingenuously, and having learnt that anything he knows is at second-hand and some four years out of date, Vera spins her fantastic tale about her aunt's "great tragedy" (p.260). Framton is immediately startled. "Somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place" (p.260), a judgement

which calls to mind Crefton Lockyer's initial reaction in "The Peace of Mowsle Barton", and Sylvia's inability to accept the sinister elements around her in "The Music on the Hill". Vera draws attention to the french windows which Framton reasonably considers to be open for ventilation purposes. But Vera disregards any such mundane explanation as she embellishes her tale, relating in graphic detail how her aunt's husband, two brothers and dog left through that window three years before to the very day, never to return. The tension mounts as she describes the tragedy and her own "'creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window-'" (p.261).

On that note she breaks off with a theatrical shudder just as her aunt, Mrs Sappleton, enters the room. This marks a turning point in the story. The slow, sinister, eerie build up of atmosphere is replaced by the brisk, matter-of-fact tone of the aunt who apologises to Framton for being late and hopes that "'Vera has been amusing you?'" (p.261), a conventional pleasantry to be expected from such a hostess. "'She has been very interesting'" (p.261) replies Framton cagily, but determinedly polite as ever.

As the aunt "rattled on cheerfully" (p.261) about her husband and brothers who have been out shooting and whom she expects to return at any moment, she is sublimely oblivious that "to Framton, it was all purely horrible" (p.261). More and more convinced that Mrs Sappleton is mad he tries to change the subject but "her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond" (p.261).⁶⁵ In a bid for her attention Framton announces that he is under doctor's orders to avoid all mental and physical exertion. In labouring "under the tolerably wide-spread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities" (p.261) and in the barely suppressed yawn which is Mrs Sappleton's reaction to that information, the "flutter, indicative of general boredom" (p.432) which greets Lola's

announcement about her dream in "A Bread and Butter Miss" is called to mind. Observations such as these are what Katrakis perceptively calls 'insights' which illustrate universal truths.⁶⁶

Mrs Sappleton exclaims, "'Here they are at last!'" (p.261) and Framton "turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension" (p.261). He is appalled, therefore, to see Vera "staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes" (pp.261-62). When he turns round "in a chill shock of nameless fear" (p.262) he is entirely unmanned at the apparition of three figures walking towards the open window through the gathering dusk, accompanied by the dog all as described by Vera down to the chanting of "'I said, Bertie, why do you bound?'" (p.262). (It is an interesting detail and typical of Saki that according to Vera the youngest brother chants this song because it irritates the aunt).

The picture of Framton in full flight calls to mind Octavian Ruttle chasing after the children towards the pigsty, or Van Cheele racing to save the Toop child, in its comic absurdity. Mrs Sappleton's remarks to her husband that the fleeing figure was "'a most extraordinary man'" (p.262) and that "'one would think he had seen a ghost'" (p.262),⁶⁷ give rise to Vera's next flight of fancy. She relates an impromptu tale which is horrifying in its content and all the more macabre because she tells it "calmly" (p.262). Dispassionately she comments, "'Enough to make any one lose their nerve'" (p.262). Her self-possession is as total at the end of the story as at the beginning. As Saki laconically observes, "Romance at short notice was her speciality" (p.262).

Instead of the supernatural, the joke which Vera Durmot plays on the "rather cheerless, oldish young man" (p.271), Latimer Springfield, in "The Lull", requires the cooperation of a piglet

and a cockerel and the invention of a burst reservoir. "It was the sort of joke I would like to have perpetrated myself," says Tom Sharpe,⁶⁸ and involves mythical boy scouts; a maid who "has already identified three bodies that have floated past the billiard-room window as being the young man she's engaged to" (p.272), which is a pithy portrayal of a certain type of sensation-loving young woman; and the formidably callous Vera who observes, "'Either she's engaged to a large assortment of the population round here or else she's very careless at identification. Of course it may be the same body coming round again and again'" (p.272).

The aunt is as humourless as "the fairly strenuous plodder" (p.271) for whose welfare she is concerned. In contriving that Latimer should spend the night with unruly livestock in his bedroom, instead of having peace "for the due marshalling of useful facts and discreet fictions" (p.272), necessary to a prospective Parliamentarian, Vera can with justification claim "'at any rate I kept your mind from dwelling on politics all the night'" (p.275). As Saki points out in the last sentence, this "was, of course, perfectly true" (p.275), an ironic comment on Latimer's accusation that Vera is a liar.

In "The Unrest-Cure", a practical joke which in Inglis' view is "so spectacular that the victims might later have been proud to be able to boast of suffering from" it,⁶⁹ the "solid, sedate individual, sedately dressed, sedately conversational" (p.127) is a natural target for Clovis. He even invites his own fate by confessing to his travelling companion in Clovis's hearing, "'I'm not much over forty, but I seem to have settled into a deep groove of elderly middle-age. My sister shows the same tendency'" (p.127), and proceeds to expand on this theme of disliking change even to the detail of a thrush that has altered its nest-building habits and thereby upset them.⁷⁰

When the friend suggests that the remedy would be an "Unrest-cure" (p.128) Clovis becomes "galvanized into alert attention" (p.128) and makes a note of J.P. Huddle's address on his shirt cuff.⁷¹ There follows an elaborate hoax in which Clovis single-handedly conjures up the imaginary presence of a Bishop, a Colonel Alberti, and a posse of Boy Scouts, all involved in a plot "'to massacre every Jew in the neighbourhood'" (p.130). By a series of telegrams which are in themselves sufficiently unusual to occasion Miss Huddle to deviate from "the appointed day for curry" (p.129), Clovis creates the illusion of this dastardly plot and secures the presence at Huddle's house of Sir Leon Birberry, a prominent local Jew, to the consternation of Huddle who can envisage his imminent assassination. He is later joined by Paul Isaacs who has also been summoned by Clovis's bogus telegram, and Clovis adds to the general chaos by announcing with superb disregard for personal feelings, "'The Boy-scouts mistook my signal, and have killed the postman'" (p.132).⁷² The housemaid, whose fiancé this was, though understandably distraught, is callously reminded by Huddle, "'your mistress has a headache'" (p.132), albeit an unscheduled one⁷³. By this shallow self-absorption Huddle forfeits any residual right to sympathy for his present plight and engages the reader wholeheartedly on the side of the devils.

Clovis on occasion shows a gift for unselfish action, notably in "Shock Tactics" where his ingenuity is deployed in his friend's interest, any satisfaction to Clovis being incidental. In "The Quince Tree" it is the sixteen-year-old Vera who reveals a different side to her nature when she outsmarts her overbearing aunt, Mrs Bebbberly Cumble, who is threatening to evict the venerable Betsy Mullen from her cottage because she cannot pay her rent. Disguising her genuine concern for the old woman under a veil of flippancy, Vera objects that she would have to leave her garden with the quince tree in the corner, "'And she never makes any quince jam; I think to have a quince tree and not to make quince jam shows such strength of character'"

(p.326).

Her aunt, impressively dismissive, replies, "'When one is sixteen [...] one talks of things being impossible which are merely uncongenial'" (p.327), adding that the old woman "'has scarcely enough furniture to fill that big cottage'" (p.327). This prompts Vera after a brief pause for reflection to imply to her aunt that there is more of value in Betsy's cottage than anywhere else in the entire neighbourhood. There begins a dialogue in which Vera leads her aunt on, Clovis-fashion, deliberately at cross-purposes with her and teasing her into leaping to conclusions.

Her aunt's objection that there can be nothing of value left because Betsy "parted with whatever old china ware she had long ago" (p.327) is interesting for two reasons. In the first instance it shows that Betsy is genuinely needy and not just the sponger that Vera's aunt portrays in saying of her, "'Betsy Mullen always is in difficulties with her rent, and the more people help her with it the less she troubles about it'" (p.326). And in the second, it is tempting to wonder whether Mrs Cumble has not acquired the valuable china for herself in lieu of rent at some time.

Vera plays her next card by implying that the goods to which she refers are stolen, adding, "'I don't suppose I ought to tell you'" (p.327) to which her aunt predictably responds, "'You must tell me at once'" (p.327). Vera's next sally has the effect of confusing Mrs Cumble into a self-contradiction which shows her as ridiculous, pompous and hypocritical, traits which are obvious throughout the story. "'I'm perfectly certain that I oughtn't to tell you anything about it,' said Vera, 'but then, I often do things I oughtn't to do'" (p.327).⁷⁴ The aunt's predictable reply, that she would "'be the last person to suggest that you should do anything that you ought not'" (p.327) earns the deserved riposte from the impossible Vera that "'I am

always swayed by the last person who speaks to me [...] so I'll do what I ought not to do and tell you'" (p.327).

This play on words is not only amusing but gives Vera the satisfaction of unmasking her aunt's hypocrisy while denying her any cause for self-righteousness. If Mrs Cumble is to learn anything from Vera, and her curiosity will not permit otherwise, she has to condone Vera's wrong-doing in telling her. The aunt is invited to believe a fantastic tale in which all manner of respectable people are involved, not the least important of whom is her prospective son-in-law, Cuthbert.

At no time does Vera say exactly what is supposed to have been stolen but allows her aunt to draw her own conclusions, and, by dwelling on "'the frightfully good match, and that he's your ideal of what a son-in-law ought to be'" (p.329), she secures rent-free accommodation for Betsy "'with soup twice a week and my aunt's doctor to see her whenever she has a finger ache'"(p.329). In recounting the tale to a close friend she admits that she "'invented'" (p.329) the part about the stolen jewels.

Vera may be the mistress of "romance at short notice" but in "The Forbidden Buzzards" Clovis demonstrates that he "believed that if a lie was worth telling it was worth telling well" (p.331). His friend Hugo Peterby who hopes to marry Betty Coulterneb enlists Clovis's help in keeping Hugo's rival out of the way long enough to propose to her.

Their hostess, Mrs Olston, on the other hand, is equally intent on effecting a match between Betty and the "heartbreakingly rich" (p.330) Lanner, so that Clovis has to employ all his wiles to prevent her throwing the couple together. This he does, in a manner similar to Vera's in "The Quince Tree", by inviting her to believe that Lanner plans to steal the eggs of "the rough-legged buzzards" (p.331), which Mrs Olston immediately

identifies as "almost the only pair known to be breeding in the whole of Great Britain" (p.331), and left as a kind of sacred trust to her care by her absent husband.

When Clovis suggests picketing, Mrs Olston understandably thinks he means "'setting guards round the birds'" (p.332) but Clovis corrects her. "'No; round Lanner'" (p.332),⁷⁵ and this is duly accomplished on a rota system by his hostess Mrs Olston, by the fourteen year old Evelyn who "talked chiefly about good and evil" (p.332),⁷⁶ nine year old Jack, and a German governess. It was a pity after such a display of ingenuity that Hugo did not succeed in his proposal and even sadder that "the buzzards successfully reared two young ones, which were shot by a local hairdresser" (p.333), but there can be no doubt that to Clovis the fun he has had in disrupting the orderly house party would be compensation enough.

"An Emergency Brain"

Clovis and Vera often act out of a sense of pure mischief or on occasion to help out a friend. Not so Mrs Packletide in "Mrs Packletide's Tiger".⁷⁷ When she plays an elaborate trick which misfires, she compounds it with a lie which lays the perfect foundation for blackmail. Curiously, despite being told that "in a world that is supposed to be chiefly swayed by hunger and by love Mrs Packletide was an exception; her movements and motives were largely governed by dislike of Loona Bimberton" (p.115), there is a certain amount of sympathy for her in her tiger-hunting enterprise which is designed to improve on her arch-enemy's recent aviatational triumph. Certainly Mrs Packletide is one of Clovis's set, featuring in several other stories.⁷⁸

Perhaps it is the word "supposed" which provides the key. She is aware of her feelings about Loona and does not attempt to conceal them. The lunch which she intends to give "ostensibly in Loona Bimberton's honour, with a tiger-skin rug occupying most of the foreground and all of the conversation" (p.115) is

meant to fool nobody but Loona.

Mrs Packletide herself is not above the use of bribery and the "thousand rupees for the opportunity of shooting a tiger without over-much risk or exertion" (p.116) has procured the cooperation of the villagers in leaving about "the cheaper kinds of goats [...] with elaborate carelessness" (p.116) to lure an aging tiger. The weak link in the plot proves to be the paid companion, Louisa Mebbin, who combines "a morbid dread of performing an atom more service than she had been paid for" (p.116) with "a protective elder-sister attitude towards money" (p.116). Thus it was she "who drew attention to the fact that the goat was in death-throes from a mortal bullet-wound, while no trace of the rifle's deadly work could be found on the tiger" (p.117). "Evidently the wrong animal had been hit" (p.117) the tiger dying of fright, but the villagers are happy with their hush money and "gladly connived at the fiction that she [Mrs Packletide] had shot the beast" (p.117). Saki adds laconically, "'and Miss Mebbin was a paid companion'" (p.117), the full significance of which proves doubly ironic later.

The celebrations take place as planned and Mrs Packletide gilds the lily by going "to the County Costume Ball in the character of Diana" (p.117). It is only a few days after the ball that Mrs Packletide's bubble of triumph is burst when Louisa Mebbin says, "'How amused every one would be if they knew what really happened'" (p.118). When challenged to explain, Louisa Mebbin does not prevaricate. "With her disagreeably pleasant laugh" (p.118) she replies, "'How you shot the goat and frightened the tiger to death'" (p.118). Her succinct and uncompromising answer lends her a kind of moral superiority in sharp contrast to Mrs Packletide's blustering "'no one would believe it'" (p.118). Louisa's perfect reply that "'Loona Bimberton would'" (p.118) is more than enough for Mrs Packletide and in an unaccustomed role of suppliant she begs, "'You surely wouldn't

give me away?' " (p.118).⁷⁹

Louisa Mebbin answers "with seeming irrelevance" (p.118) that there is "'a week-end cottage near Dorking that I should rather like to buy'" (p.118), the only oblique answer she has given. She has named her price and as "paid companion" she is granted it. There is a fine irony in the name "Les Fauves" (p.118)⁸⁰ which she gives to her cottage "with its garden borders of tiger-lilies" (p.118). Speculation among her friends as to its acquisition is clearly rife since they think, "'It is a marvel how Louisa manages to do it'" (p.118). Mrs Packletide, having paid a bribe in the first instance and blackmail in the last remains diplomatically reticent to the end, intimating that she has given up big game hunting because "'the incidental expenses are so heavy'" (p.118). She has paid in order to put Loona out of countenance; she has also paid Louisa to save face. Mrs Packletide's tiger has turned out to be Louisa Mebbin.

Another instance of 'the biter bit' is in what Pritchett calls "the shattering absurdity of 'Louis'"⁸¹ in which the manipulative Lena Strudwarden is outmanoeuvred by her husband, aided and abetted by his sister Elsie. Strudwarden wants to visit Vienna for Easter while Lena favours Brighton as usual. First of all Lena speciously objects that Vienna would be expensive, but Strudwarden is not deceived and speaks feelingly about the "meaningless luncheon parties" (p.414) he would have to endure. "Lena Strudwarden maintained an equally feeling silence" (p.415) before her usual excuse about the difficulties arising from taking her pet dog, Louis, on holiday and the impossibility of leaving him behind.

Just as in "The Reticence of Lady Anne", all the clues that justify the surprise ending are present. Louis is described as "snug and irresponsive" (p.415), Strudwarden remarks, "'It isn't as if you were in the least bit fond of animals'" (p.415),⁸²

"'you snatched him away from old Lady Peterby the other day'" (p.416), "'all that I ever see of him is the tip of his unhealthy-looking little nose'" (p.416) and so on. But Lena, who acts like someone with "a beautifully meek nature, who would, however, send the whole world to the stake sooner than yield an inch where she knew herself to be in the right" (p.415) is immovable. Clearly she has many of the characteristics of Thirza Yealmton in "The Holy War".

Strudwarden's sister is quite forthright about the solution to his problem. "'You must get rid of that dog [...] it must be helped to some sudden and merciful end'" (p.416). He admits that the same idea has occurred to him but that "'it's not very easy, though, to arrange a fatality for a creature that spends most of its time in a muff or asleep'" (p.417). Elsie, however, has the perfect plan down to the last detail, of putting Louis, kennel and all, into a box and gassing him. But when they lift the lid of the box, "Louis sat at the door of his dwelling, head erect and ears pricked, as coldly and defiantly inert as when they had put him into his execution chamber" (p.418). Strudwarden is so startled that he drops the kennel and looks hard at "the miracle-dog" (p.418); "then he went into a peal of chattering laughter" (p.418) (like Georg in "The Interlopers"). Lena's secret is out: "It was certainly a wonderful imitation of a truculent-looking toy Pomeranian" (p.418).

But the story has a final twist, for Strudwarden tells Lena that Louis has had to be destroyed for biting the butcher's boy and that the money which would have gone to buy her an Easter present will have to be paid to the boy in compensation. Not content with that he insists that she accompany him "'to Vienna to consult Dr Schroeder who is a specialist on dogbites'" (p.418); and the final crowning irony, "'I have sent what remains of Louis to Rowland Ward⁸³ to be stuffed; that will be my Easter gift to you instead of the buckles'". It is no wonder, therefore, that Lena's "attempt at laughing was an unmistakeable

failure" (p.418). Strudwarden has very cleverly and completely called Lena's bluff. If she calls Strudwarden a liar, she condemns herself.

The tables are very neatly turned on the greedy and mean Smithly-Dubbs in "The Phantom Luncheon" too, a story in which another favourite device of Saki's is employed, that of mistaken identity combined in this case with pretended amnesia. In being asked by her husband, Sir James, to invite them somewhere exclusive for lunch because they are politically useful at election times, Lady Drakmanton protests, "'I consider that showing hospitality to the Smithly-Dubbs is carrying Free Food principles to a regrettable extreme'" (p.428).

She implores her sister Milly to stand in for her, since "'people say that we are so alike that they can hardly tell us apart'" (p.428), but is turned down since Milly has a luncheon engagement of her own at the Carlton the following day. In reflecting to herself, "'It shall be rather an amusing lunch-party'" (p.428), Lady Drakmanton whets the reader's appetite for what is to come. The following day finds Lady Drakmanton in the lobby of her club where she knows the Smithly-Dubbs will be waiting "with their tongues hanging out of their mouths and the six-course look in their eyes" (p.428), but her appearance has been so dramatically changed that the Misses Smithly-Dubb are clearly a little unsure about her identity.

Greed, however, prevails as she asks them "'What is the Carlton like for lunching in?'" (p.429) and on their "enthusiastic recommendation" (p.429) suggests that they go and lunch there. Throughout the extravagant meal Lady Drakmanton responds non-committally to all political allusions until "with a scared look around her" (p.430) she confesses "'I'm suffering from a complete loss of memory'" (p.430). The only thing she can remember is "you asking me to come and lunch with you here, and that I accepted your kind invitation" (p.430) at which "the

scared look was transferred with intensified poignancy to the faces of her companions" (p.430).

Her timing is perfect for just as the Smithly-Dubbs are assuring her that she is Lady Drakmanton, their attention is drawn to Milly, the look-alike sister, who is just entering the room. "The uneasiness in their eyes deepened into horror. In outward appearance the lady [...] certainly came rather nearer to their recollection of their Member's wife than the individual who was sitting at table with them" (p.430), appearances as always deceiving, and the choice of the word, "individual" conveying their new-found distaste. The eyes again have an important role to play, in the case of the victims, betraying their true emotions, and in the jokers, as a means of masking them.

To compound their horror, Lady Drakmanton now 'rediscovers' a mythical identity, that of the humble "'Ellen Niggle, of the Ladies' Brass-polishing Guild'" (p.430). In common with Laploshka they are snobbish as well as mean.⁸⁴ "To have fed themselves liberally at their own expense was, perhaps, an extravagance to be deplored [...], to have drawn an unknown and socially unremunerative Ellen Niggle into the net of their hospitality was a catastrophe that they could not contemplate with any degree of calmness" (p.431).

Mrs Packletide is determined to outdo Loona Bimberton, Lady Drakmanton turns the tables on the Smithly-Dubbs and in "The Occasional Garden" it is the boastful Gwenda Pottingdon who is due for a fall. The garrulous Elinor Rapsley in her breathless adjuration to the Baroness,⁸⁵ "'Don't talk to me about town gardens [...] which means, of course, that I want you to listen to me for an hour or so while I talk about nothing else'" (p.505), reveals a sense of humour and a self-knowledge unusual in Saki's portrayal of women. She continues to enlarge on the subject for the next fifty lines of the story, impelled by the imminent arrival of a self-invited lunch guest, the insufferably

smug Gwenda whose garden, like everything else about her, is "the envy of the neighbourhood" (p.506). Elinor says of her disparagingly, "'When her eldest child was confirmed it was such a sensational event, according to her account of it, that one almost expected questions to be asked about it in the House of Commons'" (p.506).

The Baroness, however, has the perfect solution in the shape of the "O.O.S.A.", that is, "The Occasional Oasis Supply Association" (p.506), who can provide instant gardens. Since it is Gwenda Pottingdon, the "envy of the neighbourhood" (p.506) who is to be impressed the "emergency E.O.N. service" (p.507) with something "like a miracle out of the Arabian Nights" (p.507) could be conjured up to grace Elinor's humble back yard. Readily persuaded and gleefully seeing the possibilities of such an arrangement, Elinor, who can be just as terse as she can be garrulous, says, "'Quick [...] the address of the Association'" (p.507).

"The pomegranate and lemon trees, the terraced fountain, where golden carp slithered" (p.508) to say nothing of "the pagoda-like enclosure, where Japanese sand-badgers disported themselves" (p.508) have the desired effect of suppressing Gwenda's appetite for the excellent food and boasting about her own garden. Unfortunately, only a few days later Gwenda pays an unscheduled visit and Elinor's yard is in its usual state. That is when "'having an emergency brain'" (p.508) comes to her rescue and she invents a suffragette raid which she claims has ruined her garden, assuring Gwenda with superb aplomb, "'I shall have it laid out again on rather more elaborate lines'" (p.508).

There is a surprise in store for the masterful Adela Chemping in "The Dreamer" also. As an illuminating description of the vagaries of the female shopper and an expansion on the theme of "The Sex That Doesn't Shop", "The Dreamer" provides many telling insights which still hold true today. But there is more to the

story than that in the person of Cyprian,⁸⁶ another in the Reginald, Clovis, Bertie mould. Enlisted by his aunt as a parcel carrier in her bargain-hunting expedition during the annual sales, he turns up hatless, giving his aunt a moment of disquiet. "'You are not going to be what they call a Nut, are you?'" (p.323) she enquires anxiously, concerned in case this means that carrying her parcels will not suit his image. In having "the wondering look of a dreamer, the eyes of one who sees things that are not visible to ordinary mortals" (p.323) he is nevertheless the very reverse of otherworldly, a very shrewd judge of character who looks at his aunt "with his wondering, dreamy eyes" (p.323)⁸⁷ and gives her an answer, tailor-made to reassure her as to his good manners and reliability: "'I didn't bring a hat [...] because it is such a nuisance when one is shopping; I mean it is so awkward if one meets any one one knows and has to take one's hat off when one's hands are full of parcels'" (p.323).

This does much to mollify Mrs Chemping in her distaste for the unconventional but she is not gracious in her acknowledgement of it. As he follows in her wake, "the wondering look deepened in Cyprian's eyes" (p.324), clearly now a look of disbelief at what his aunt appears to regard as a rewarding pastime, looking at, with no intention of buying, napkins. She veers abruptly from one department to another, her thought processes as inconsecutive as her movements. Having announced that she needs a salad bowl she ends up with seven flower vases of a type that are outmoded but which she informs Cyprian "'will do for presents next Christmas'" (p.324). (It is January).⁸⁸

For a friend who is going abroad she buys "stacks of writing paper; it was so cheap and it went so flat in a trunk or portmanteau. She also bought a few envelopes - envelopes somehow seemed rather an extravagance compared with notepaper" (p.324), her mean streak predominating. Cyprian is consulted as

to the colour, chooses grey at random, whereupon Adela asks the assistant if she has mauve, and on the production of green and darker grey, chooses blue.

There is a pause for inadequate refreshment and Cyprian leaves the parcels with the cloak-room attendant, again to Mrs Chemping's temporary disappointment, since "some of the pleasure and excitement of a shopping expedition seemed to evaporate when one was deprived of immediate personal contact with one's purchases" (p.325). She is one of those who likes to gloat over her acquisitions.

When "the dreaming look in the boy's eyes changed for a moment into one of mute protest" (p.325), Adela tells him to meet her later in the cutlery department. He is not there at the appointed time, however, and she finds him eventually in the leather goods department, the victim of what appears to be "a pardonable but rather embarrassing mistake" (p.325). Adela has the satisfaction of saying to herself, "'There now [...] she takes him for one of the shop assistants because he hasn't got a hat on. I wonder it hasn't happened before'" (p.325). Saki says simply, "Perhaps it had" (p.325), and goes on to describe Cyprian's trick of selling the bag to the lady and pocketing the proceeds.

His aunt's eyes are opened to the truth at last and "several kind strangers helped Adela into the open air" (p.326). The next time she sees him "the dream look" (p.326), clearly a dream of avarice, "was deeper than ever in his eyes. He had just sold two books of devotion to an elderly Canon" (p.326).

Throughout this story Cyprian's eyes are described as wondering and dreamy, not only "the eyes of one who sees things that are not visible to ordinary mortals" (p.323), but also "invest the commonplace things of this world with qualities unsuspected by plainer folk - the eyes of a poet or a house agent" (p.323),⁸⁹ as

Saki cynically observes. The clues have been there for someone more perceptive than his aunt to read and the remark about the hat's being "a nuisance when one is shopping" (p.323) gives rise to the suspicion that Cyprian has done this sort of thing before.

The theme of shopping is used to highlight another defect of character in "Fur". The crucial difference between Suzanne and her friend Eleanor is that the latter is prepared to help Suzanne in her scheming to acquire an expensive birthday present from her rich cousin, Bertram Kneyght, whereas Suzanne is not willing to sacrifice an evening of her time so that Eleanor can meet her friend Harry Scarisbrooke. In fact it is Eleanor who, having accepted without censure Suzanne's assertion, "'I don't want to be greedy, of course, but I don't like being wasteful,'" (p.377), devises the plan to meet Bertram and sidetrack him into the emporium where Suzanne has seen the coveted silver-fox stole.

Eleanor, in common with Clovis, Vera, Cyprian and the rest, is clearly a formidable ally and an equally formidable foe. She has what Suzanne lacks: an ability to see beyond herself, which is in itself a form of self-preservation, a kind of enlightened self-interest. Had Suzanne taken note of her friend's reaction to her glib refusal to return a favour, heeding the "angry glint coming into her eyes" (p.379), she might have been warned. But to her "the sacrifices of friendship were beautiful in her eyes as long as she was not asked to make them" (p.379).

This fatal self-absorption marks the turning point of the story. All appears to be proceeding according to plan, Suzanne forging ahead, while Bertram Kneyght is shepherded towards the fur department by Eleanor. Then Eleanor claims, "'My birthday comes the day before [Suzanne's]'" (p.380), which is the first sign of duplicity. Next she relates a pitiful tale about an elusive silver-fox stole which she had been promised but never received,

and recommends that Bertram buy Suzanne a fan, the very thing she wants least.

It is only some days later that the truth emerges. Suzanne phones Eleanor to thank her in a most perfunctory manner for what is admittedly a maliciously uninspired gift of a photograph frame, and - the real purpose of the call - to complain about Bertram's present to her. Eleanor's revenge is complete when, after some equally perfunctory remark, she tells her friend that she is the triumphant possessor of the coveted fur. The scales at last and too late fall from Suzanne's eyes. As Saki succinctly summarises in the last sentence, "A cloud has arisen between the friendships of the two young women; as far as Eleanor is concerned the cloud has a silver-fox lining" (p.381).⁹⁰

As in so many of the stories, warnings are ignored and arrogance is punished. Eleanor demonstrates the kind of quick thinking which together with longer term planning seems to characterise Saki's successful jokers and his children. This fertility of imagination and ability to carry plans through is always combined with a self-awareness and an instinctive knowledge of the weaknesses of others. Eleanor succeeds because she is inventive, thorough, ruthless when required and opportunistic, qualities which she shares with Vera, Clovis and the rest of Saki's practical jokers. The victims on the other hand have much in common with the obtuse adults like the aunt in "The Lumber-Room" or Mrs De Ropp in "Sredni Vashtar", or the wilfully blind in the supernatural stories, in being egocentric and gullible.

Throughout the lies and practical jokes there runs a thread of rough justice, the victim not only deserving his punishment but in many cases almost weaving his own fate. In the "Talking-Out" stories, as in "Adventurer Purse-Sappers", the bore or cadger is talked to a standstill. In the case of the practical jokes it

is by exploitation of the weakness or vice that the victim is routed. In every instance a deciding factor in favour of the liar or joker is his ability to exceed the worst excesses of his victim.

Notes

1 "The Tales of Saki", p.234.

2 To be discussed at greater length in "Elaborate Futilities".

3 An unsigned review of *Beasts and Superbeasts*, *Spectator*, 113 (July 11, 1914), 61.

4 Like the children in "The Penance" whose "range of sight did not seem to concern itself with Octavian's presence" (p.424), and Tobermory who "fixed his gaze serenely on the middle distance" (p.111).

5 Compare this with the description of Stephen Thorle in *The Unbearable Bassington*: "He had the loud penetrating voice and the prominent penetrating eyes of a man who can do no listening in the ordinary way and whose eyes have to perform the function of listening for him" (p.663).

6 Nicknamed "The Orchid Boy" (1894 - 1975), the French Lightweight Boxing Champion at the age of sixteen, and European Champion at Welterweight in 1911, he went on to be champion at four weights, becoming World Heavyweight Champion in 1913.

7 Caiaphas is, of course, the name of the High Priest at Christ's trial.

8 To be discussed in "Elaborate Futilities".

9 A "so-called Cullumpton ghost" features in "The Hedgehog", p.476.

10 This telltale sign is present in "The Square Egg" too: "he had the contemplative downward droop of nose and moustache and the furtive sidelong range of eye - all those things that are the ordinary outfit of the purse-sapper the world over" (p.542).

11 Like Amblecope in "A Defensive Diamond": "There was silence for nearly half a minute" (p.356).

12 Curiously reminiscent of Treddleford's tales in "A Defensive Diamond" in which blotting-paper and camels feature separately. Perhaps this is another instance of the "dangerous or improper uses" of blotting-paper referred to in "The Sex That Doesn't Shop" (p.56).

13 *The Importance of Being Earnest*: "To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness" in Oscar Wilde, *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems* (London: Dent, 1961), p.360.

14 L.pp.310-15.

15 This perception of the passage of time is evoked in "Sredni Vashtar" also: "the minutes were slipping by. They were long minutes, but they slipped by nevertheless" (p.139); in "The Penance": "a watch, into which the soul of a dead plumber seemed to have passed" (p.427); and in "Cross Currents": "the ill-assorted trio watched the insufferable hours crawl slowly by" (p.89); whereas in "The Mouse": "the minutes throbbed by" (p.97) where Voler's is an experience of accelerated time in his wish to delay the moment of truth.

16 This recalls the ending of "The Interlopers".

17 There are also interesting parallels to be drawn with "The Wolves of Cernogratz" in which a feeling of scandalous outrage is the chief reaction to Amalie's supernatural claims and one of relief when the seemingly miraculous can be accounted for by some more mundane explanation. "'It was an impertinence,' snapped out the Baron, his protruding eyes taking on a scandalized expression" (p.411), and "The Baroness eagerly agreed that the cold was responsible for these things" (p.414).

18 Loganbill's description of him, p.106.

19 Recalling "a spirit of wistful emulation took possession of the author" (p.472) in "Mark".

20 Gortsby in "Dusk" as well as having a similar name has similar characteristics to Gorworth.

21 This eponymous verb has a parallel in "'Ministers of Grace'": "to koepenick" (p.215), see footnote 55, "The Domain of Miracle".

22 In the original version of "Esmé", published in *Westminster Gazette*, December 17, 1910, p.3, the Baroness is recounting the tale to the "Irrelevant Man", the introduction of Clovis obviously a later change to suit the collection: "The Chronicles of Clovis".

23 In "The Almanack" (L.pp.293-98), a practical joke in which Clovis and Vera Durmot are partners, the hunting part of the story includes precisely these ingredients.

24 "'My final capture by the winning pair was not a very dramatic episode, in fact, I'm not sure that they would have

taken any notice of me if I hadn't spoken to them and patted them'" (p.52).

25 The mention of Crowley in conjunction with the word "beast" two lines later is almost certainly intended to suggest 'Aleister' Crowley (1875-1947), a Satanist who claimed to be the Beast from the Book of Revelation. An article by Aleister Crowley, entitled "Concerning 'Blasphemy' in General and the 'Rites of Eleusis' in Particular" appeared in *Bystander*, November 16, 1910, p.321 (with an editorial disclaimer).

26 The ironic observation that "'I doubt if he's ravening at the present moment'" (p.104) has an echo in "The Recessional": "wolves are always ravening from mere force of habit, even after they've hopelessly overeaten themselves" (p.202), and in "The Guests": "'Not in the least ravening [...] it was full of goat'" (p.421).

27 Referred to by Fogle (p.90) as "Anabel" and "Annabel" (twice). The fact that Saki has drawn attention to the name in saying, "Her name was Amabel; it was the vicar's one extravagance. Amabel was accounted a beauty" (p.17), makes this kind of error the more surprising and may be another indication of the sort of cursory study to which Saki has so often been subjected.

28 An incident which calls to mind Groby's treatment of the stable-boy in "The Remoulding of Groby Lington", p.228.

29 Christmas appears to have the same effect on Bertie Steffink in "Bertie's Christmas Eve" (pp.436-41) and with similar consequences to Bertie.

30 The flavour of this story seems to derive from a couple of incidents in Saki's own life, notably during a stay in Dresden and again in Davos, described by his sister in her "Biography", pp.26-34.

31 Perhaps the same Princess as referred to in "The Talking-Out of Tarrington", p.190.

32 There are obvious parallels to be drawn with the plots of "The Penance" and "Hyacinth" where pigs are also used by children for ransom purposes.

33 Elizabeth Drew, *Atlantic Monthly*, p.97, says that in Hilaire Belloc's poem, "Matilda came to a bad end, but Saki's child and adult liars never come to a bad end".

34 Although a Mrs Covering appears in "Fate", p.484.

35 In "The Open Window", "The Lull", "A Touch of Realism", "The Quince Tree", and "The Almanack".

36 Like that in "The Lumber-Room".

37 All Saki's children seem to be well versed in the Bible. To the compulsory "three rs" in the primary education of the day a fourth might be added: religion.

38 In "The Penance" they are perched on a wall and in "The Lumber-Room" the aunt is trapped in a tank, for example.

39 "Saki and Wodehouse", p.90.

40 "Only once had she put the doctrine of non-interference into practice, when one of its most eloquent exponents had been besieged for nearly three hours in a small and extremely uncomfortable may-tree by an angry boar-pig" (p.283), a variation on the theme of "The Boar-Pig".

41 A symptom as disquieting to the initiated as "the dangerous enthusiasm of a convert" (p.17) displayed by Reginald in "Reginald's Choir Treat".

42 As in "The Jesting of Arlington Stringham", pp.133 and 136, and in "The Hedgehog", p.476.

43 Compare this to the sentiments expressed in "Hyacinth": "'Children with Hyacinth's temperament don't know better as they grow older; they merely know more'" (p.519).

44 Saki's first love, of history, shows itself in this reference to the peasant uprising in France in 1357-58.

45 A meal as uncomfortable as at the end of "The Lumber-Room" when "tea that evening was partaken of in a fearsome silence" (p.376).

46 This incident is repeated in *A Watched Pot*:

"... 'but a hen came in between them'.

Hortensia: A hen?" (p.887).

It is a hen that starts the trouble between the Cricks and the Saunderses in "The Blood-Feud of Toad-Water" too (pp.56-59).

47 "Partial Expression" will be discussed in "Elaborate Futilities".

48 In this case Damocles. Vagueness like this, as in "Mark": "the Reverend What's-his-name" (p.470), or in "The Quince Tree": "the Louvre picture, La Something or other" (p.327), for instance, is a frequent target for Saki's barbs, ironically called "lack of specialization" (p.49) in "The Lost Sanjak".

49 The word "migration" in conjunction with the name, Martlet (a house-martin), helps to compound the absurdity of the feud concerning a hen. As Katrakis says in her dissertation, Jane is "the type who 'roosts' wherever she goes" (p.82).

- 50 *Spectator*, 197 (Dec.21, 1956), 907.
- 51 Like Clovis in "The Stampeding of Lady Bastable", p.119.
- 52 Equivalent to the "strenuous, unseeing gaze" (p.280) which is an invitation to comment in "The Romancers".
- 53 A characteristic shared by Van Cheele and others.
- 54 In "For The Duration of the War" it is "elderly colonels, who had outlived the love of truth" (p.536).
- 55 The same Lord Pabham who features in "Esmé" and perhaps intended to indicate Lord Pelham, one of the Victorian 'Beef Barons'.
- 56 Mortimer in "The Music on the Hill" gives a serious warning along the same lines: "'if you're wise you won't disbelieve in him [Pan] too boastfully'" (p.162).
- 57 Clovis is ironic here. In "Dusk" Gortsby is apologetic in saying, "'You must excuse my disbelief, but appearances were really rather against you'" (p.301).
- 58 In "The Boar-Pig" Matilda uses over ripe medlars to lure the pig.
- 59 This same subtle technique to underline a joke is used in "Reginald at the Carlton": "'taught to speak - oh, dozens of languages! - and then he became a Trappist monk'" (p.25).
- 60 "Saki: Practical Jokes...", p.124.
- 61 Described thus in *Spectator*, July 11, 1914, p.61.
- 62 'The Satiric Art of H.H. Munro (Saki)', pp.29-35.
- 63 'Development of Method and Meaning...', p.112.
- 64 The irony of the name "Vera", meaning true, is that while she may be an accomplished liar, she exposes the truth about her victims.
- 65 Just like the distracted Sophie in "The Byzantine Omelette" or the bearded stranger in "Quail Seed", p.432.
- 66 'The Satiric Art...', p.30.
- 67 Just as in "Gabriel-Ernest", Van Cheele's aunt says, "'One would think you had seen a wolf'" (p.66).

68 In his "Introduction", *The Best of Saki* (London: Picador, 1976), p.7.

69 *Spectator*, 197, p.907.

70 In "The Almanack" too, Vera can predict what sermon the vicar will preach at New Year, because "'at his time of life men dislike change'" (L.p.294).

71 He uses his shirt cuff as an emergency note pad in "A Matter of Sentiment" too, p.206.

72 Both Vera (in "The Lull") and Clovis betray an amused interest in Boy Scouts and a disregard for the finer feelings of maids.

73 "It was not her day for having a headache" (p.130).

74 This exchange has much the flavour of Nicholas in "The Lumber-Room" talking to his aunt in the gooseberry garden.

75 This kind of inverted protection is like Clovis's suggestion of putting barbed wire round the yew tree in "The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope" (p.210).

76 Bearing out Reginald's assertion in "Reginald on Tariffs": "There are only two classes that really can't help taking life seriously - schoolgirls of thirteen and Hohenzollerns" (p.30).

77 Frederick L. Beaty, "Mrs Packletide and Tartarin", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Notes and Queries*, (December 1952), 219-20, draws attention to the inspiration behind this tale.

78 For instance, "The Recessional", in which she is again engaged in upstaging Loona Bimberton. Her appeal for Clovis is as "a sort of financial ambulance" (p.200).

79 Just as Octavian pleads with the children, "'You surely wouldn't treat my poor little Olivia in that way?'" (p.426).

80 Apart from its literal meaning, "Les Fauves" is a reference to the first of the great aesthetic movements in twentieth century painting, reaching its peak in 1905-06.

81 V.S. Pritchett, p.18.

82 Lena is even "'quite indignant with me if I interfere on behalf of an ill-treated, over-driven animal on the road'" (p.415), says Strudwarden, showing that he shares the same values as Lady Carlotta (p.283).

83 "The premier taxidermist of late Victorian London" according to Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, p.274.

84 "Except when he was the bidden guest of some one with an irreproachable income, Laploshka was wont to curb his appetite for high living; on such fortunate occasions he let it go on an easy snaffle" (p.73) and "towards the poor [...] his attitude was one of watchful anxiety" (p.72).

85 Almost certainly the same Baroness as the romancer of "Esmé", and the willing audience in "The Story of St Vespallus".

86 An ingenious and daring choice of name with its connotations of depravity.

87 He much resembles Reginald who has "the dreamy, far-away look that a volcano might wear" (p.7), "Reginald".

88 Presents such as this justify Reginald's sentiments in "Reginald on Christmas Presents", pp.8-10.

89 The imaginative propensities of house agents feature in "Excepting Mrs Pentherby" too: "It might easily languish in the estate market for years, set round with notice-boards proclaiming it, in the eyes of a sceptical world, to be an eminently desirable residence" (p.466).

90 Just as the loss of Constance Broddle's friendship is more than compensated for by the proceeds from the brooch in "Esmé".

Chapter 5

"ELABORATE FUTILITIES"

The last chapter dealt with practical jokes and lies with a purpose. It is the intention to deal in this chapter with the deceptions and prevarications, the petty dishonesties and obsessive keeping up of appearances that are so much a part of this artificial society and without which its fabric would disintegrate. Saki's characters are engaged in elaborate futilities in two senses: the life style itself with its meaningless affectations and lack of proper purpose, all form and no content; and in the ineffectual machinations of these people who are so easily routed by the Clovises, animals or simply a quirk of fate or their own inadequacies.

In *The Unbearable Bassington*, Francesca says to herself, "'What on earth would become of these dear good people if any one started a crusade [against] mediocrity?'" (p.583), a rhetorical question which sets the tone of the short stories to be examined in this chapter.¹ In the early "Reginald" sketches the pattern is clearly defined. The targets are no match for Reginald's barbs and sallies. As Saki expands his range in the second and subsequent collections² his attacks are more often oblique and demand the collusion of the reader for proper appreciation. They take several forms: "diplomatic reticence" which often masks unpleasant thoughts or motives; invective which in tone resembles the outspoken and outrageous Reginald sketches though frequently more acerbic; art and artifice where the staginess of the characters and their obsession with appearances is penetrated by some shaft of wit, trick of fate, an animal upsetting the orderly pattern or often a combination of all these things to show up the false values. Sometimes blackmail is used, sometimes absurdity, sometimes political allusion; everywhere there is deceit and lying which are so vital to the society which Saki is satirising.

Reginald

As Green³ says, "An inclination to affect indifference to everything important and a fascination for everything others thought of no consequence" are what form the basis for Saki's kind of humour, an idea expanded by Drake in "The Sauce for the Asparagus".⁴ There is evidence of this in the very first of the Reginald sketches where Reginald spends hours choosing which waistcoat to wear to the garden party at which he creates havoc among the stuffed shirts, the hypocrites and the social climbers before concluding - as if this is the only occasion for regret during the entire afternoon - "'I believe an apricot tie would have gone better with the lilac waistcoat'"(p.8).⁵

It is clear from the first that everything that Reginald says or does is for effect, often of "a stampede" (p.8). His elaborate poses: "Reginald shut his eyes" (p.6), "Reginald puckered his brow into a tortured frown"(p.6), "Reginald was possessed with a great peace, which was not wholly to be accounted for by the fact that he had inveigled his feet into shoes a size too small for them" (p.6), all point to the kind of "imp of Inconsequence" to whom things did not happen "but happened around him" as Vivian Carter puts it.⁶ On his first appearance at a garden party, he offends a colonel by drawing attention to his age. Reginald himself "in his wildest lapses into veracity never admits to being more than twenty-two" (p.7)⁷, and this inverted observation sets the tone for the Reginald prototype. He introduces the son of a Temperance devotee to a recipe for absinthe, and he outrages the Archdeacon's wife by discussing with her a risqué French Play which occasions a "peptonized reproach in the good lady's eyes" (p.8).

Reginald in his effete preoccupation with his own appearance draws attention to the obsession with superficialities of the society in which he moves. In "Reginald on the Academy", he

observes of the pictures: "'one can always look at them if one is bored with one's surroundings, or wants to avoid an imminent acquaintance'" (p.10). The purpose of a visit to the Academy is not to look at the pictures but to be seen.⁸ Reginald digresses about the sort of people he meets at the Academy before discussing the pictures themselves, which "'are so refreshingly real and probable, they take one away from the unrealities of life'" (p.11). This leads to ironic comment on the titles of the pictures and to the observation that "'another darling weakness of the Academy is that none of its luminaries must "arrive" in a hurry'" (p.12), adding with uncanny topicality that "'you can see them coming for years, like a Balkan trouble or a street improvement'" (p.12).

"Reginald at the Theatre" introduces the Duchess with her unquestioning middle-class attitudes, whose complacency he temporarily upsets with questions like, "'I wonder [...] if you have ever walked down the Embankment on a winter night?'" (p.14), an atypically serious remark, before resuming his mantle of flippancy. As Chapman points out, it is "not the destitution to which Saki wished to draw attention (it merits only a glancing reference), so much as the limited vision of the Duchess".⁹

In "Reginald at the Carlton", he succeeds in shocking the Duchess by his outrageous inconsequentialities. Sententiously she remarks, "'A scandal, my dear Reginald, is as much to be avoided at Monaco or any of those places as at Exeter, let us say'" (p.24), to which Reginald replies with truth, "'Think how many blameless lives are brightened by the blazing indiscretions of other people'" (p.24). He flits from topic to topic effortlessly, his flippancy punctuated by her wooden responses,¹⁰ as they gossip about acquaintances. Reginald is deliberately facetious, she is unconsciously funny. Women of this sort abound in Saki's writings and inevitably call to mind Ethel Munro's description of their Aunt Tom.¹¹ In her humourless way, the Duchess says of "the Whimples", for example, "'Their eldest

son was such a disappointment to them; they wanted him to be a linguist, and spent no end of money on having him taught to speak - oh, dozens of languages! - and then he became a Trappist monk'" (p.25). The effect of the pause after "speak" is a masterly touch from Saki subtly underlining the joke.

Reginald replies that "'there are different ways of taking disappointment'" (p.25), and cites the instance of a girl who, having nursed an uncle until he died, finds that he has left his money to - of all preposterous things - "'a swine-fever hospital [...] now she gives drawing-room recitations. That's what I call being vindictive'" (p.25). Ignoring this, the Duchess waxes philosophical. "'Life is full of its disappointments [...] and I suppose the art of being happy is to disguise them as illusions. But that, my dear Reginald, becomes more difficult as one grows older'" (p.25). This rare moment of insight from the Duchess is more than matched by Reginald: "'The young have aspirations that never come to pass, the old have reminiscences of what never happened. It's only the middle-aged who are really conscious of their limitations'" (p.25). The cynical truth of this exchange reveals the serious purpose which underlies much of the frivolity of the Reginald sketches - one of Roberts' "apothegms of wise nonsense".¹²

In more characteristic vein Reginald pokes fun at what passes for theatrical entertainment in "Reginald's Drama".¹³ Striking a typical pose, "Reginald closed his eyes with the elaborate weariness of one who had rather nice eyelashes and thinks it useless to conceal the fact" (p.28) and tells "the Other" that he intends to write a great drama which no one will understand with "'Wolves in the first act, by Jamrach'" (p.28).¹⁴ Stream of consciousness leads him to a digression about "'the case of the Mudge-Jervises'" (p.28), who "'belonged to the Guild of the Poor Dear Souls'"¹⁵ who "'hold the record for having nearly reformed a washerwoman'" (p.29). In celebration of this achievement the laundress is invited to an "'At Home' at Agatha Camelford's"

(p.29) where she unfortunately encounters liqueur chocolates. "It was like finding a whelk-stall in a desert as she afterwards partially expressed herself" (p.29), the remainder of what she said being left to the imagination.

When the inebriated laundress gives a performance as a dancing bear Agatha's character is neatly summed up as someone who "doesn't approve of dancing, except at Buckingham Palace under proper supervision" (p.29). And when the washerwoman impersonates a parrot in a cage only "Baroness Boobelstein who has attended sittings of the Austrian Reichsrath" (p.29)¹⁶ "had heard anything like it" (p.29). Brought back again to discussion of the play, Reginald explains that "the wolves would be a sort of elusive undercurrent [...] that would never be satisfactorily explained" (p.30), obviously not like the laundress who "went in for realism rather than a Maeterlinckian treatment of the subject" (p.29). As a justification, Reginald adds, "After all, life teems with things that have no earthly reason" (p.30).

The gift for "partial expression" is to be found throughout Saki's work,¹⁷ but possibly in greatest concentration in the Reginald sketches where the emphasis is on dialogue rather than incident. For instance, in "Reginald on Worries", discussing the colour of his aunt's hair he comments, "She says her particular tint of bronze is a natural advantage, and there can be no two opinions as to the advantage" (p.19). In "Reginald's Choir Treat", Reginald himself is described: "None of the rest of his family had anything approaching Titian hair" (p.16) and it is tempting to wonder whether this was a "natural advantage" like his aunt's.

The Duchess figures again in "Reginald's Rubaiyat" which not only mocks the poets and poetry of the day but is also an excuse to range over several other topics which expose the hypocrisy of the Duchess and her like. She accuses Reginald of bribery in giving grapes to an undecided voter and political propaganda to

a sick woman instead of vice versa, since "it might have compromised the candidate she was supporting" (p.37). As Reginald ironically points out, "he was expected to subscribe to church funds [...] football and cricket clubs and regattas" and so on "but bribery would not have been tolerated" (p.37).

In "Reginald on House-Parties" he laments the fact that "'one never really knows one's hosts and hostesses'" (p.20). As a glimpse behind the scenes at a typical Edwardian house-party, it is to be hoped that this is an exaggeration, but many of the observations have a certain timeless ring of truth about them. Again hypocrisy is under attack as when Reginald says, "'one gets to know [...] whether the story about the go-cart can be turned loose in the drawing-room, or must be told privately to each member of the party, for fear of shocking public opinion'" (p.20).

He is cruel on the subject of the house guests too, in particular "the girl, for instance, who reads Meredith, and appears at meals with unnatural punctuality in a frock that's made at home and repented at leisure" (p.21). Reginald is complacently confident that he is exempt from the usual social strictures as being "nice-looking and sufficiently unusual to counterbalance" (p.21) such girls. But Reginald's personal *bête noire* is the sort of person who "fires *Exchange and Mart* questions at you" (p.22) especially "when I was doing my best to understand half the things I was saying" (p.22). In having a sense of humour as an antidote to his vanity Reginald keeps a sense of proportion about himself.

The dire consequences of telling the truth are described in "Reginald on Besetting Sins" where a bad habit which started in a small way grows insidiously in order to fill the vacuum of the Woman's empty life. By the time she is "veracious even to months" (p.26) about her age, she has offended her elder sister and many others besides.

"For instance, she told Miriam Klopstock exactly how she looked at the Ilexes' ball" (p.26), the consequences of which may be imagined. Miriam, after all, is described in "The Innocence of Reginald" as taking "'nines in voices'" (p.39), and belonging to the Macaws' Hockey Club from which she is banned "'because you could hear what she thought when her shins got mixed up in a scrimmage for half a mile on a still day'" (p.39). Reginald further explains that the Macaws are so called because they wear a blue and yellow strip "'but I understand there was nothing yellow about Miriam's language'" (p.39), another fine example of "partial expression".

The Woman's friends believe that a family might have mitigated her compulsion to tell the truth since "children are given us to discourage our better emotions. That is why the stage [...] can never be as artificial as life" (p.26), an observation which recalls Reginald's views on paintings at the Academy too. Thus her progress towards self-destruction leads her to offend her dressmaker, whose "establishment was a meeting-ground for naked truths and overdressed fictions" (p.27), an instance of the "epigram and pinpoint flippancy" noted by Lambert.¹⁸ Having lost the "artless mendacity of past days" (p.27), she goes on to tell the cook a home truth about her drinking habits. "The cook was a good cook, as cooks go; and as cooks go she went"(p.27), a joke which is possibly Saki's best known.

Reginald's last appearance in the very first story of the second collection ("Reginald in Russia") is chiefly memorable for the passage of stilted French which calls to mind the episode in the much later story, "The Boar-Pig". Perhaps Reginald may be best summed up in his own words in "The Innocence of Reginald": "'I love people who do unexpected things'" (p.39).¹⁹ As the forerunner of all the mischief-making and irreverent pranksters he is perhaps the one who depends most on his verbal ability to rout the opposition. He is certainly the most self-conscious and narcissistic which doubtless reinforces his love of "people

who do unexpected things". Nothing is sacred to him, he is ruthless in his exposure of the elaborate futilities of the society in which he conducts his own elaborately futile existence. As he says to the upstart Lady Beauwhistle in "Reginald on Worries", "'If you want a lesson in elaborate artificiality, just watch the studied unconcern of a Persian cat entering a crowded salon'" (p.20). Observing the proprieties is all important, social grace, decorum and politeness masking either hostility or the sort of vacuous relationship of the Egberts and Lady Annes of Saki's world.

"Diplomatic Reticence"

"The Reticence of Lady Anne" is the most extreme example of the kind of 'polite reticence' constantly under attack by Reginald, Clovis and the like. Not only is the story a masterpiece of short-story technique, as demonstrated by Otto²⁰ and others, it is also a bitter attack on the kind of relationship which Saki satirises again and again, where the superficial conventions are observed but the underlying truths are very different. In this story, appearances deceive Egbert to the bitter end. He leaves the room unaware that Lady Anne's pose "was rather elaborately rigid" (p.46) because she has "been dead for two hours" (p.49). He is aware only of his own personal sense of injury: "To get the worst of an argument with her was no new experience. To get the worst of a monologue was a humiliating novelty" (p.48).

In "The Mouse", another inadequate male, appropriately called Theodoric Voler, is routed by a mouse and his own mouse-like disposition. He has been brought up to be shielded from "the coarser realities of life" (p.94) and is thus unprepared to deal with the predicament in which he finds himself, without suffering extremes of embarrassment.

His ordeal occurs during a railway journey in a carriage which he is sharing with a young lady and which has no access to a corridor. While this ensures him of "semi-privacy" (p.95) it

does have the disadvantage that he cannot discreetly escape in order to divest himself of a mouse which is crawling up his trousers and "whose motto, indeed seemed to be Excelsior" (p.95). For somebody who is so morbidly sensitive that he is discomposed by having to harness a pony with the help of the vicar's daughter "in an ill-lighted outhouse called a stable, and smelling very like one" (p.95) and who "had never been able to bring himself even to the mild exposure of open-work socks in the presence of the fair sex" (p.96), the dilemma in which he now finds himself is unimaginable.

At least the young lady "seemed inclined for slumber rather than scrutiny" (p.95) which emboldens Theodoric to "the most audacious undertaking of his life" (p.96). Since "furtive stamps and shakes" (p.95) have failed, "nothing less drastic than partial disrobing would ease him of his tormentor" (p.96) and rescue him from the "horrible position of a Rowton House²¹ for vagrant mice" (p.96). He screens himself from the young lady's view by draping his travelling rug across the carriage from one luggage rack to the other, and has just succeeded in getting rid of the mouse when to his horror the improvised curtain slips, "and almost simultaneously the awakened sleeper opened her eyes" (p.96).

Grabbing the rug and hauling it up to his chin, he is so discomfited by the "silent stare" (p.96) of the young lady that he gabbles, "'I think I have caught a chill'" (p.96). There follows a dialogue in which the absurdity of Theodoric's position is intensified by his embarrassed reticence. The answer to his tentative question whether his companion is afraid of mice is disconcertingly flippant, "'Not unless they came in quantities, like those that ate up Bishop Hatto'"²² (p.97), which does nothing to reassure him. Finally he blurts out that he has had a mouse trapped in his clothes and that "'it was getting rid of it that brought me to - to this'" (p.97). Understandably she is surprised and exclaims, "'Surely leaving off one small mouse

wouldn't bring on a chill'" (p.97), another very Clovis-like remark.

Theodoric thinks that "evidently she had detected something of his predicament and was enjoying his confusion" (p.97). He has added paranoia to his repertoire of obsessions. As he nears the station he realises that "dozens of prying eyes would be exchanged for the one paralyzing pair that watched him from the further corner of the carriage" (p.97) and his only hope is that his companion will fall asleep again. But "the furtive glance which Theodoric stole at her from time to time disclosed only an unwinking wakefulness" (pp.97-8).

"Like a hunted beast" (p.98) Theodoric is forced to break cover and scramble into his clothes, aware all the time of "an icy silence in that corner towards which he dared not look" (p.98). This silence when broken reveals the twist in the story: she has all the time been unaware of his predicament because she is blind.

As in other stories, the frequent reference to 'eyes' and the use of the word 'furtive' draw attention to the undercurrents and the underlying motives; but in this story they have an added significance, contrasting the physical blindness of the young woman with Theodoric's mental blindness, his reliance on superficial 'evidence'. Voler in his morbid self-consciousness has missed all the signs. He could even have asked her to avert her gaze and discovered the truth much earlier. His suffering has been entirely unnecessary, and in leaping to the uncharitable conclusion that she has been enjoying his mortification he has punished himself.

The Pigeoncotes in "The Seven Cream Jugs"²³ are likewise the authors of their own misfortune.²⁴ In this amusing satire, which exposes greed, snobbery and hypocrisy, Wilfrid Pigeoncote, who as "a prospective nobody" (p.500) and with the reputation of a kleptomaniac was an undesirable guest, is made welcome by the

Peter Pigeoncotes now that "'he has become heir to the baronetcy and to a lot of money'" (p.500).²⁵ They are anxious, however, to secure their valuables, a problem complicated for them by the occasion of their silver wedding and the presence of a lot of additional silverware on display at their house.

Convinced that Wilfrid has robbed them of a piece of silver, with "a swift and furtive rush" (p.502) they ransack his belongings and discover a silver cream jug, which they appropriate and restore to what they believe to be its rightful place. To their consternation, however, Wilfrid informs them that a thief has stolen from his luggage a cream jug which he had intended as a present, and when Mrs Pigeoncote checks, there are now eight instead of seven cream jugs on display.

Not only have the Pigeoncotes misjudged Wilfrid's character, they have mistaken his identity too.²⁶ Instead of "Wilfrid the Snatcher" (p.500), it was "Wilfrid the Attaché, a very superior young man, who rarely came within their social horizon" (p.503). They might have been warned of this since "the guest had none of the furtive, half-apologetic air that his cousins had rather expected to find" (p.501).

In rectifying this appalling blunder, Mrs Pigeoncote is willing to sacrifice the unwitting Peter's reputation by telling Wilfrid "with confidential coyness" (p.504) of "'Peter's little weakness'" (p.504). Peter never learns of his wife's ruthless duplicity, and house-guests thereafter take their jewels with them wherever they go, even when they visit the bathroom. As Saki obliquely observes, "diplomatic reticence does not necessarily extend to family affairs" (p.505), and Wilfrid has obviously told tales.

The greed and hypocrisy of the Brimley Bomefields in "The Way to the Dairy" is fittingly rewarded also. In seeking to secure their aunt's entire fortune for themselves they devise an elaborate plan to show up a favoured rival, her nephew Roger,

for the inveterate gambler he is, and thereby introduce their aunt to the delights of gambling. Roger has been kind to his aunt when she was "unobtrusively poor" (p.174) and while initially she appears to fall in with the Brimley Bomefields' suggestions she very rapidly establishes a supremacy. She is not prostrated as they are by sea-sickness during the channel crossing; as an erstwhile "paid companion" (p.175) her knowledge of colloquial French is vastly superior to theirs; and while the girls keep "a furtive watch" (p.176) on the door of the casino, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Roger, the aunt is enjoying herself in the first stage of her road to gambling ruin.

The consequences of gambling take an unexpected turn in "The Stake" too when Ronnie Attray sacrifices the services of his mother's cook for two days in lieu of a more conventional stake. Even worse is "A Sacrifice to Necessity" in which Beryl's gambling for high stakes has the effect of social ruin unless a matrimonial bargain is struck with Ashcombe Gwent, the man to whom Beryl owes the money. Mrs Pevenly, who "lived and kept up appearances" (L.p.304) on a very tight budget, understandably thinks that it is her daughter who is to be the "sacrifice to necessity" but she is disabused by the forthright Beryl who tells her baldly that "'it isn't me that he wants to marry. 'Flappers' don't appeal to him, he told me so [...] It's you that he's infatuated about'" (L.p.308); which suggests that she has already offered herself as a sacrifice to necessity and been turned down. When the wedding takes place, the presents are "costly if not numerous and consisted chiefly of a cancelled I.O.U., the gift of the bridegroom to the bride's daughter" (L.p.309), which brings to mind the ironic wedding present in "The Brogue".

Gambling is driven underground in "A Matter of Sentiment", a story featuring among others Mrs Packletide,²⁷ Bertie van Tahn and Clovis. At Lady Susan's house-party on the eve of the Derby, polite reticence is the order of the day since, apart

from her exceptional kindness, Lady Susan's main characteristic is a professional disapproval of almost everything.

"Disapproval was to her what neuralgia and fancy needlework are to many other women" (p.204). Thus when the house-guests debate which horse to back, "it could only be fitfully and furtively discussed" (p.204). This leads by a process "of rather strangled and uneasy conversation" (p.204), of subterfuges and stratagems, by way of lies on the part of Mrs Packletide which encourage "the odious Bertie van Tahn" (p.205)²⁸ to murmur "audible prayers for Mrs Packletide's ultimate estrangement from the paths of falsehood" (p.205), to the moment at dinner when the butler imparts his cunningly acquired inside information to each of the guests.

There is a "furtive curiosity directed [...] towards Motkin's impassive countenance" (p.206) as he discreetly whispers the "cryptic words, 'Better not'" (p.206) which Mrs Packletide comically thinks refers to the sherry he is proffering at the time. The shrewd Clovis "was already pencilling it on his cuff" (p.206),²⁹ while the less subtle "Colonel Drake, in his turn, was signalling to every one in hoarse whispers and dumb-show the fact that he had all along fancied 'B.N.'" (p.206).

The following afternoon finds the guests assembled in the hall, "waiting apparently for the appearance of tea" (p.206). When the real reason for their presence - a telegram announcing the Derby winner - arrives, Clovis uncharacteristically blurts out, "'Sadowa won; an utter outsider'" (p.206), and, to everyone's astonishment, Lady Susan exclaims, "'How remarkable! It's the first time I've ever backed a horse; in fact I disapprove of horse-racing, but just for once in a way I put money on this horse, and it's gone and won'" (p.206). The name had attracted her because it reminded her of all the happiest moments of her married life. The elaborate futilities in this instance are twofold: the guests need not have kept their betting a secret from Lady Susan and, as it turns out, picking a horse at random

as she has done would have been more effective.

Even more elaborate and equally fruitless are the attempts to back the winner in "A Bread and Butter Miss". When Mrs de Claux asks one of her house guests, Lola Pevensey, with "perfunctory solicitude" (p.432) whether she has slept well, Lola's reply that she has dreamt the winner of the Derby occasions "a swift reaction of attentive interest" (p.433). She describes in fragmentary detail this dream which she has had on two consecutive nights, adding that "'when I dream things two or three nights in succession, it always means something'" (p.433). Unfortunately her dream is capable of more than one interpretation and her fellow guests pin their hopes on her dreaming again that night and with greater attention to detail. To complicate matters, Lola says that she is unlikely to sleep at all that night since she suffers every fifth night from insomnia "'and it's due tonight'" (p.434).

All manner of remedies are suggested, including one from their hostess proposing the use of "oakleaves, soaked in warm water and put under the bed" (p.434).³⁰ In being "'a martyr to insomnia for years'" (p.434) Lola cannot hope for sympathy from Odo who objects, "'Now we are being martyrs to it'" (p.434). She comes down to breakfast after a wakeful night and is induced to have a nap since "'it would be so good for you - and [the real reason] you might dream something'" (p.435). Despite the most elaborate precautions against possible disturbance, however, she is unable to fall asleep, and they divide their bets between the two horses suggested by Lola's dream. In the event neither horse wins.

The vain and exhaustive preparations of an over-anxious hostess to secure the right social mix for her house-party are again overthrown by the unexpected in "The Oversight".³¹ On previous occasions Lady Prowche's guests have fallen out over such diverse subjects as the "Suffragette question" (p.514),

"Christian Science" (p.515) and "Lloyd George" (p.514) amongst others ; and expressed themselves in "language that would not have been tolerated in the Austrian Reichsrath" (p.515). This time, however, "'The only stone that I have left unturned'" (p.516), as she confides to Lena Luddelford, is whether or not two of her guests are anti-vivisectionist. With Lena's help she solves this problem only to discover that she has overlooked another: "'One of them was Pro-Greek and the other Pro-Bulgar'" (517).³²

As in "The Oversight" the tribulations of hosting a house-party are explored in "A Housing Problem" in which 'polite reticence' and invective are again at war. Bobbie Chermbacon, in calling the Marchioness "'to her face, a moth-eaten old hen'" (L.p.299), is understandably *persona-non-grata* with his hostess Mrs Duff-Chubleigh. But as she confides to Mrs Pallitson, Bobbie has been showing signs of interest in her daughter Margaret and she has every wish to encourage his suit, since Bobbie is rich in his own right and has expectations as well.

Mrs Pallitson comes to the rescue with a suggestion that she invite Bobbie and Margaret to be her house guests, which earns her a rapturous gratitude. "'After this we must call each other by our Christian names" (L.p.301), says Mrs Duff-Chubleigh. But the unfortunate Mrs Pallitson is called Celeste and she says, "'When a woman weighs as much as I do -'" (L.p.301). She gets no further: "'I am sure you don't, 'exclaimed her hostess, in defiant disregard of logic" (L.p.301), betraying an eagerness to ingratiate herself. Such then is the kind of insincere social exchange which so brilliantly highlights the superficiality of such friendships. The warmth is short-lived, lasting only as long as Mrs Pallitson is willing to continue the arrangement to the liking of Mrs Duff-Chubleigh. Bobbie now gives offence to a house guest of Mrs Pallitson by telling a Bishop his opinion of Christian missions. As Mrs Pallitson revealingly says, "'I've often said the same thing myself, but never to a Bishop'"

(L.p.302), the Bishop in question being "'a bachelor uncle, with private means'" (L.p.302). In refusing to entertain Bobbie any longer Mrs Pallitson is condemned by Mrs Duff-Chubleigh: "'those heavy blond women are always a mass of selfishness'" (L.p.303).³³ The Clovis-like Bobbie unexpectedly ends up by marrying the Marchioness, thus the elaborate machinations of both women come to nothing.

Art and Artifice

The elaborate poses and posturings of Saki's characters, their exaggerated types and extravagant expressions have an innate theatricality about them which invites the reader to stand apart from them as an audience might and observe their antics in the knowledge that they are acting a part. Some stories are stagey, none more so than "The East Wing", subtitled "A Tragedy in the Manner of the Discursive Dramatists".³⁴ This is possibly the most extravagant statement of all Saki's futilities.

The house party with its typical social mix of bumbling Major Bovertry, the precious Lucien Wattleskeat, the wordy Canon Clore and a breathless hostess, Mrs Gramplain, is beset by a fire in the middle of the night in the east wing of the house. Begged by their hostess to save "'my poor darling Eva - Eva of the golden hair'" (M.p.41) Lucien demurs on the grounds that he has never even met her. "'You see, my life is not only wonderful and beautiful to myself, but if my life goes, nothing else really matters - to me'" (M.p.41), he explains. It is only on discovering that Eva is not a flesh and blood daughter, but Mrs Gramplain's painting of the daughter that she wished that she had had and which she has faithfully updated with the passing years, that Lucien exclaims, "'it is the most beautiful thing I ever heard'" (M.p.43).³⁵ He is willing to forfeit his life to rescue her, since "'death in this case is more beautiful'" (M.p.43) a sentiment endorsed by the Major. As the two men disappear into the blaze, Mrs Gramplain recollects that she

"'sent Eva to Exeter to be cleaned. Those two men have lost their lives for nothing'" (M.p.44), and adds "'the tragic irony of it all!'" (M.p.44).

Curiously, while Saki obviously would like to have been a successful playwright - as attested by his early one-act plays and his collaboration with Maude³⁶ on *A Watched Pot* - he never seemed to strike the right note. Despite this, ironically, as Emlyn Williams intimates in his introduction to Saki's short stories,³⁷ many of these stories have been very successfully adapted for the stage.

Included in "The Chronicles of Clovis", however, is a short story in the form of a playlet, the only one in such a form in the complete collection.³⁸ "The Baker's Dozen", a satirical sketch set on board a ship, has the slightest of plots and depends for its effect on the ambiguity of the dialogue. Major Dumbarton on meeting Mrs Emily Carewe affects a romantic manner, while she is down-to-earth. "Emily! After all these years! This is fate!" (p.90). She replies, "Nothing of the sort; it's only me" (p.90). Discarding any pretence that this is a chance meeting, she openly admits that she has deliberately engineered it and steamrollers the Major along the chosen path.

When the Major protests, "'Look here, Emily, it's not fair to go at that rate [...] It's my place to propose to you; all you've got to do is to say 'Yes'" (p.91), she replies, matter-of-factly, "'Well, I've practically said it already, so we needn't dawdle over that part'" (p.91). The whole discussion has the air of a business transaction and when they come to the matter of children from their previous marriages they discover that between them they have thirteen, the baker's dozen of the title. The Major says preposterously, "'If we could only bring them down to twelve. Thirteen is so horribly unlucky'" (p.91) and there ensues an absurd and very amusing discussion as to how this might be achieved.

Emily suggests "'that one of them might turn out depraved and vicious, and then you could disown him'" (p.92) to which the Major replies in all sincerity, "'You can't expect a boy to be vicious till he's been to a good school'" (p.92). She counters with the possibility of inherited depravity, pinning her hopes on an aunt of the Major's "'who was never spoken of'" (p.92), until he points out that, "'In mid-Victorian days they labelled all sorts of things as unspeakable that we should speak about quite tolerantly. I daresay this particular aunt had only married a Unitarian, or rode to hounds on both sides of her horse'" (p.92), which is an illuminating illustration of Victorian prudery in all its absurdity. It is also noteworthy that it is the henpecked Major who is expected to sacrifice a child although his contribution to the unfortunate total is five to Emily's eight, and that he tacitly accepts the responsibility.

With the arrival on the scene of Mrs Paley-Paget, who is clearly very snobbish and the soul of propriety, the Major and Emily sound her out with a view to her adopting a child in order to help them out of their difficulty. The Major talks of her "'childless hearth [...] no little pattering feet'" (p.93) to which the offended Mrs Paley-Paget replies, "'I've got my little girl [...] her feet can patter as well as other children's'" (p.93). In typically humourless fashion she responds loftily to the Major's oblique point that there is "'only one pair of feet'" (p.93) with the observation, "'Certainly. My child isn't a centipede'" (p.93). The exchange continues with Mrs Paley-Paget misunderstanding the Major's earnest and bumbling attempts at delicacy until she leaves in outraged indignation.

The problem resolves itself naturally, after all, when the Major discovers from a recount that he has in fact only four children, Albert-Victor having been counted twice. This theme of not

knowing "to a child or two how many they've got" ("Esmé", p.105), is a familiar one, and the dialogue revealing hypocrisy, stupidity and the vapid preoccupations of the characters is a common one in the Saki canon. The weapon Saki has chosen in this instance is witty dialogue spiced with invective and absurdity.

This same mixture is true of "Wratislav", a story similar to the early "Reginald" sketches in relying on dialogue and having a very meagre storyline. Baroness Sophie is a foolish woman who is no match for the cruel invective of the Gräfin. Poor Sophie in musing, "'I don't know why I shouldn't talk cleverly [...] my mother was considered a brilliant conversationalist'" (p.152), is put down uncompromisingly by the Gräfin's retort that "'These things have a way of skipping one generation'" (p.152), and when the Gräfin suggests her son Wratislav "the black sheep of a rather greyish family" (p.153) as a suitable husband for Sophie's daughter Elsa, Sophie's objection that Elsa would be most unhappy with Wratislav is overruled with the brutal observation that "'a little misery [...] would go so well with the way she does her hair'" (p.153).

Elsa in the event unexpectedly runs away with the chauffeur, which causes Sophie such consternation that she forgets herself sufficiently to reveal her origins: "'Such a thing as that no one in our family has ever done'" (p.154), the word order idiosyncratically Germanic as in "The Wolves of Cernogratz".³⁹ The Gräfin deliberately misunderstands her to Sophie's fury and the story ends on a weak pun,⁴⁰ the whole episode being more like a scene from a play than a short story.

From staginess Saki moves to the music hall stage in "Cousin Teresa",⁴¹ a satire on false values and pseudo-intellectuals. Basset Harrowcluff might with justification expect to feature in the Honours' List for his services to Empire, but it is his

idiotic half-brother Lucas who wins that distinction for an inane Music Hall hit with a catchy refrain and a complicated stage direction. As Cobley⁴² observes, a "favourite target of Saki's arrows is the popular fad of the day or the craze of the moment which is generally silly and often vulgar". In "Canossa" too Saki alludes to "the popular song of the moment [...] a tune they had all heard hundreds of times" (p.461). Basset despises Lucas for the "elaborate futilities" (p.307) of his life. Lucas is described as "over-well nourished" (p.307) (like Van Cheele, Waldo Plubley and others), whose "hair and forehead furnished a recessional note in a personality that was in all other respects obtrusive and assertive" (p.307). In sharing with Jews certain facial characteristics Clovis feels "it was undoubtedly a case of protective mimicry (p.307); clearly most of Lucas's friends are Jewish."⁴³

The irony of the story is that while Lucas is always saying that his latest idea is "'simply It'" (p.307), the Cousin Teresa couplet catches on in a big way. "Restaurant proprietors were obliged to provide the members of their orchestras with painted wooden dogs on wheels, in order that the much-demanded and always conceded melody should be rendered with the necessary spectacular effects" (p.309). Lucas is invited to do a lecture tour and the pseudo-intelligentsia utters fatuous pronouncements such as, "'One welcomes an intelligible production like "Cousin Teresa", that has a genuine message for one. One can't understand the message all at once, of course'" (p.310). The final twist is delivered when Harrowcluff's name appears on the Honours' List, after all; but it is not the deserving Basset but Lucas, for his services to Literature.

As in "Cousin Teresa", the false values of those who admire "The Chaplet" in the story of that name are mocked. This hit tune of the day, when played *ad nauseam* in a high-class restaurant, causes the chef to go mad. The "Jordan Valley" (p.144) as always is well represented and the inadequacies of the *nouveau*

riche exposed. "The wine lists had been consulted [...] with the blank embarrassment of a schoolboy suddenly called on to locate a Minor Prophet in the tangled hinterland of the Old Testament" (p.145),⁴⁴ as Saki maliciously observes, adding absurdly and in a manner that recalls Waldo Plubley's teapot in "A Touch of Realism",⁴⁵ "by insisting on having your bottle pointing to the north when the cork is being drawn, and calling the waiter Max" (p.145), the host can impress his guests - a type still recognisable today.

The chef, Aristide Saucourt, who, "if he had an equal in his profession he had never acknowledged the fact" (p.145), has laboured long and hard to produce the masterpiece which merits lengthy and rhapsodic description and the grand title of 'Canetons à la mode d'Amblève'. To see this work of art congealing on the plate or being eaten in an absent-minded manner while the diners applaud yet another rendition of 'The Chaplet' is more than this 'genius' can bear and he takes a fearful revenge. "Whether the leader of the orchestra died from drowning by soup, or from the shock to his professional vanity, or was scalded to death" (p.147) the doctors cannot decide. What is obvious, however, is where the reader's sympathies are directed. The orchestra leader is an ineffectual vain upstart, like Lucas Harrowcluff, while the chef has at least the excuse of virtuosity even if the elaborate preparations are worthy of a greater cause.

As an example of "elaborate futility" "The Byzantine Omelette" is without equal. Several groups are targeted in this story of strikes, of Fabian socialism, snobbery, hypocrisy and the feeble ineptitudes of members of a society who are so dependent on their servants that they cannot do their own hair, dress for dinner without help or, crowning absurdity, extricate themselves from a portable Turkish bath. Sophie Chattel-Monkheim, a Fabian socialist with a convenient amount of wealth, is the worst sort

of snob. She purports to disapprove of class distinctions but is nevertheless delighted to be entertaining the Duke of Syria to dinner and in having her maid, Richardson, contrive a hairstyle grand enough for the occasion.

Her mood of self-satisfaction is shattered by the news that the servants have gone on strike because Gaspare, "'the emergency chef! The omelette specialist!'" (p.316) was a strike breaker on some previous occasion and the servants are striking in protest unless Gaspare is dismissed. This is unthinkable to Sophie since she has engaged him specially as "'the only man in England who understands how to make a Byzantine omelette'" and "'the Duke loves Byzantine omelettes. It was the one thing we talked about coming from the station'" (p.316), a clear indication of the sort of person the Duke is and by implication Sophie also.

To add to the crisis Richardson is obliged to 'down tools' as a member of the union. Sophie is effectively hoist by her own petard in having "'refused to employ any but union servants'" (p.317), the irony being that Richardson is "'a good Conservative, and I've no patience with this Socialist foolery, asking your pardon'" (p.317). If Sophie's inability to do her own hair is inconvenient, Catherine Malsom's predicament in being only half-dressed is far worse and that of her husband more embarrassing still. He is trapped in "'that ridiculous new-fangled Turkish bath that he insists on taking with him everywhere'" (p.317); and every time he "'pulls the lever marked 'release' he only releases hot steam'" (p.318). Since the steam is either "'bearable'" or "'scarcely bearable'" (p.318), Catherine feels that "'by this time I'm probably a widow'" (p.318).

Despite her extreme reluctance Sophie is forced to sack Gaspare, and the servants duly return to their various tasks. "Except that Henry Malsom was of the ripe raspberry tint that one

sometimes sees at private theatricals representing the human complexion, there was little outward sign [...] of the crisis that had just been encountered and surmounted" (p.318). Sophie is distracted, however, by recent events and as ever the eyes tell the truth, "straying with increasing frequency" (p.318)⁴⁶ towards the door through which the butler will come to announce dinner. This contrasts sharply with the opening scene in which she is sitting complacently before her mirror, "tranquilly" (p.315) reviewing the prospects of social triumph. But her trials are far from over for dinner is cancelled. The kitchen staff who belong to a separate union have come out in support of the sacked chef; and Sophie has a severe nervous breakdown as a consequence. She has learned to her cost that it is impossible to make a Byzantine omelette without breaking eggs.

The kind of amateur theatricals alluded to in "The Byzantine Omelette" are demonstrated in "The Peace Offering", a play intended to patch up a political quarrel. Clovis devises "'something on the lines of Greek tragedy'" (p.179) but to be performed "'in the Sumurun manner'" (p.180),⁴⁷ which he explains entails "'weird music, and exotic skippings and flying leaps, and lots of drapery and undrapery. Particularly undrapery'" (p.180). The plot gets more and more elaborate, as the Baroness tries to upstage Clovis while he "introduced some effective bit of business for the charioteer (and he introduced a great many)" (p.182).

When she appropriates a speech that Clovis has written for himself "there was a dangerous glitter in his eye that might have given the Baroness warning" (p.183). His revenge takes the form of coaching the obtuse Emily Dushford in the role of Cassandra to make an attack on local politicians in the presence of "'the County'" which is "'socially divided'" (p.179). Lady Thistledale and her set are scandalized, which ironically has the effect of uniting the opposing factions in their condemnation of "the Baroness's outrageously bad taste and

tactlessness" (p.184). Emily's "severely plantigrade walk" (p.182) may be seen to symbolise all the platitudinous, unimaginative women incapable of flights of fancy, just as Emily is incapable of "flying leaps into futurity" (p.182) in her role as a flat-footed Cassandra.

There are unforeseen consequences in "The Background" too, a satire on false values and the sort of art critics who talk of "'certain pictures as "growing on one," as though they were a sort of fungus'" (p.121). This remark of Clovis's reminds his journalist friend of the story of Henri Deplis, a commercial traveller from Luxembourg, who squanders a modest legacy on "some seemingly harmless extravagances" (p.122). The chief of these is having his back tattooed with "The Fall of Icarus" by Signor Pincini while in Italy which gives rise to unexpected problems when he is declared a work of art, forbidden to return to his own country, and cannot even bathe for fear of damaging the masterpiece.

When "a certain German art expert [...] declared it to be a spurious Pincini" (p.123) he becomes the centre of an international controversy, and, being of "a constitutionally retiring disposition" (p.123) he is driven to throw in his lot with Italian anarchists. "Four times at least he was escorted to the frontier as a dangerous and undesirable foreigner, but he was always brought back as The Fall of Icarus" (p.124) as Saki sardonically observes. Thus the tattoo has assumed the foreground in terms of value and importance and Henri Deplis is a "human background" (p.124), his rights as a person of no significance. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that in having acid thrown over him during an anarchist uprising "his assailant was severely reprimanded for assaulting a fellow-anarchist" but he "received seven years' imprisonment for defacing a national art treasure" (p.124).

"On Approval" though less violent is yet a bitter attack on the "would-be-Bohemian" (p.385). Gebhard Knopfschrank, a struggling

artist from Pomerania, frequents the Nuremberg restaurant where he displays his work for sale. He has no takers and becomes progressively poorer although several people are afraid he might be an undiscovered genius, considering his paintings "'may be immensely clever [...] something epoch-making in the realm of art'" (p.387). Typical of these is "Sylvia Strubble, who spoke rather as one who knew every individual member of the Russian imperial family" (p.386) in which she resembles the "elaborately British" (p.87) Dobrinton in "Cross Currents".⁴⁸

In being "elusive" (p.385) Gebhard does not materially help them to decide whether he is an undiscovered genius or not. But his work is unusual in depicting London scenes in which animals have taken over from people, and having titles like: "'Wolves and wapiti fighting on the steps of the Athenaeum Club'" (p.389), which encourage the speculation that Saki implies that Town life is a jungle. One day Gebhard appears in the restaurant and orders a celebratory meal, whereupon everybody buys up his work assuming that he has made a substantial sale which in their eyes immediately promotes him to the ranks of the famous. The irony is that a rich American travelling in Pomerania has run down some pigs on Gebhard's father's farm and is paying him handsome compensation. Again, all the agonising on the part of the would-be-Bohemians has turned out to be in vain. They have been deceived by the appearance of success.

"Hush Money"

While the "elusive" Gebhard keeps the "would-be-Bohemians" guessing there is clearly far more to the serious-minded Septimus in "The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope" too. As editor of "*Cathedral Monthly*" (p.207) and an expert on religious matters, being overheard saying "'I love you, Florrie'" (p.208) is extremely surprising to all who know him. By coincidence Mrs Troyle, Clovis's aunt, has a maid called Florinda and the

conclusion to be drawn is obvious. The circumstantial evidence builds up against Septimus in the form of a piece of paper on which he has written, "'I love you, Florrie [...] Meet me in the garden by the yew'" (p.209). There is a yew tree in the garden which gives Clovis cause to remark, "'At any rate he appears to be truthful'" (p.210).

This seeming scandal fuels further speculation about how he can afford foreign holidays and smart clothes on his meagre salary as editor of a religious periodical. Clovis's preposterous suggestion that "'perhaps he sells spurious transepts to American enthusiasts'" (p.210) meets with the humourless response from Mrs Riversedge, "'such a thing would be impossible'" (p.210) which is reminiscent of similar remarks made by for instance, Eleanor's mother in "The Jestings of Arlington Stringham". Mrs Troyle and Mrs Riversedge are agreed that at all costs he is not to be permitted to court Florrie, but are unsure how to put a stop to it. Clovis's flippant suggestion that "'You might put a barbed wire entanglement round the yew tree as a precautionary measure'" (p.210) shows that he is obviously enjoying the disproportionate fuss they are making and recalls the manner in which Reginald baits the Duchess in "Reginald at the Carlton" and other such sketches.

Alone together after lunch, Septimus "seemed restless and preoccupied" and Clovis "quietly observant" (p.211). When Septimus asks Clovis "'What is a lorry?'" (p.211), Clovis has his opening, immediately realising that Septimus is looking for a word to rhyme with "Florrie". Clovis intimates this to Septimus who becomes more uneasy, saying "'I believe you know more'" (p.211) to which Clovis responds with an enigmatic laugh. When asked how much he does know, he merely says, "'The yew tree in the garden'" (p.211), and Septimus believing that his secret is out, confides to Clovis that "'I get quite a decent lot of money out of it'" (p.211). This ambiguous statement astounds Clovis, "but he was better skilled in repressing surprise"

(p.211). He is even more shocked when Septimus confides that apart from Florrie, "'there are a lot of others'" (p.212). At this revelation, "Clovis's cigarette went out" (p.212) until he realises that it is verses to which Septimus is referring not conquests. Like the youth in "Dusk", Clovis has difficulty in suppressing his mirth.

Septimus is now so relieved at having confessed that he becomes expansive, volunteering that he is the author of several well-known 'hits' (as in "Cousin Teresa"), but that his reputation as an expert on "'memorial brasses'" (p.213) would be compromised if he were found to "'be the author of that miserable sentimental twaddle'" (p.213) which he now actively hates writing. Clovis comes to his rescue with a typical solution, suggesting that he "'merely reverse the sentiment and keep to the inane phraseology of the thing'" (p.213), adding that he will expect a share in the royalties "'and throw in my silence as to your guilty secret'" (p.213). Thus his diplomatic reticence which has the effect of eliciting a confession from Septimus takes on the added dimension of blackmail.

But Clovis is not finished yet. He tells his aunt and his hostess that when he spoke to Septimus, "'he was quite frank and straightforward with me when he saw that I knew his secret'" (p.214). That much is true, but then Clovis improves the moment by pretending that he has talked him out of his honourable if "unsuitable" (p.214) intentions to Florinda because she "'was the only person in the world who understood my aunt's hair'" (p.214) and that perhaps (and this is reminiscent of "Reginald on Christmas Presents") "'a really nice scarf-pin (to be chosen by myself)'" (p.214) would be an acceptable token of gratitude.

There is a price to be paid for silence in "The Treasure Ship" too. The Machiavellian machinations of the avaricious Lulu, Duchess of Dulverton,⁴⁹ in recruiting Vasco Honiton to help in the recovery of a wreck of the Spanish Armada are doomed to

disappointment. She feels entitled to any treasure the wreck may contain since "one of her ancestors on her mother's side was descended from Medina Sidonia" (p.263).⁵⁰ Vasco is "blessed with a small income and a large circle of relatives, and lived impartially and precariously on both" (p.263) which ought to have been warning enough to Lulu. In diving off the coast of Ireland as a kind of rehearsal for the real thing, Vasco comes across what proves to be a treasure ship of a different kind, a motor-boat fittingly called the "Sub-Rosa" which contains incriminating evidence against the Duchess and her friends. Like Louisa Mebbin in "Mrs Packletide's Tiger" he is able to buy a villa with his 'hush-money', which he ironically calls "the Villa Sub-Rosa" (p.245).

If the Duchess uncovers an unwelcome secret and pays the price, Sir Lulworth Quayne in "The Blind Spot" succeeds in preserving one. He is anxious to head off the righteous Egbert⁵¹ when he wants to discuss a letter from the recently deceased great-aunt Adelaide concerning the death of her brother and the alleged involvement of Sir Lulworth's cook. The blind spot refers to Sir Lulworth's turning a blind eye to and destroying evidence of the obvious guilt of the cook because he may be "'a common murderer, possibly, but a very uncommon cook'" (p.297). Such a preposterous set of values is justifiable in the views of Sir Lulworth, Clovis and their like as an antidote to the stifling priggishness of the Egberts of the world.

Devious behaviour is also in evidence in "The Yarkand Manner". In this story based on a true incident,⁵² the *Daily Intelligencer* is being edited and published "'from a roof in Yarkand'" (p.312) which Sir Lulworth takes to be an extension of "the sudden impulse to trek and migrate that breaks out now and again, for no apparent reason" (p.310). Much of the flavour of the routine articles remains unchanged but for those on foreign affairs, which are often "blunt, forcible, outspoken" (p.313) and lacking in "diplomatic ambiguity" (p.313); so disconcerting in fact that

a government deputation insists on seeing the editor. The only member of staff in evidence, however, is the office boy who eventually hands over a ransom demand for the entire editorial staff which he had received several months earlier and which he "had quietly suppressed" (p.314), using "the large accumulation of special articles that was held in reserve for emergencies" (p.314) to keep the paper going. "The articles on foreign affairs were entirely his own composition" (p.314) as Saki sardonically remarks. To avoid the embarrassment of acknowledging that the office boy has competently run the entire operation in their absence, "the whole thing had to be kept as quiet as possible" (p.314), and the office boy, far from being sacked, "'is still in journalism'" (p.315).

The ransom demanded on the disappearance of Crispina Umberleigh is kept quiet too. Her departure "was not regarded by the family entirely as a bereavement" (p.406), which is a fine example of "polite reticence" if the description of Crispina is taken into account. She "was born to legislate, codify, administrate, censor, license, ban, execute and sit in judgement generally" (p.406). It is not surprising, therefore, that her family blossoms in her unexpected and prolonged absence, and that opportunistically her sons decide "that their mother might be wandering somewhere abroad, and searched for her assiduously, chiefly, it must be admitted, in a class of Montmartre resort where it was extremely improbable that she would be found" (p.407), an interesting illustration of "elaborate futility" with a purpose.

It seems that her husband has had knowledge of her whereabouts for some time and has been "paying the ransom, or hush money" (p.408) to secure the pleasure of her continued absence for several years. She has been "a purely mythical prisoner" (p.409), turning up of her own accord after a prolonged attack of amnesia. Fortunately in the interim she has lost much of her

power over her now adult offspring but her husband is in some difficulty trying to explain away the disappearance of so substantial a sum of money.

"The Mappin Stamp"

Occasionally Saki allows himself to be less oblique in his attacks. Drake in "Ironic Stories"⁵³ and Loganbill⁵⁴ among others agree with Cheikin⁵⁵ that "The Mapped Life" is "a statement of Saki's intentions". Certainly it is more straightforward, the inverted values are stated explicitly and the niece's observation that "'a moonlight hen-stealing raid with the merry-eyed curate'" (p.482) would be more fun, seems to point to at least one reason for the kind of escapade so beloved of Saki's juvenile delinquents. In the discussion between the niece and her aunt, Mrs Gurtleberry, about the "Mappin Terraces"⁵⁶ (p.479), "'lack of initiative'" (p.480) is the recurrent weakness exposed and the predictability of the uncle's behaviour is the last straw for the aunt, who in having things drawn to her attention by her implacable niece has to face the underlying truths behind the carefully preserved facade, that hers is a meaningless existence, filled with "'self-deception'" (p.480), "'conventional make-believe'" (p.482) and "'little everyday acts of pretended importance'" (p.481). Like Reginald, the niece is on the side of those "who do unexpected things" (p.39).⁵⁷

Less muted is the despair expressed by Mrs Gramplain in "The East Wing", when she laments, "'it will all begin over again now, the old life, the old unsatisfying weariness, the old monotony; nothing will be changed'" (M.p.45). The loss of two lives and the reduction to ashes of the east wing pale into insignificance for her beside the tragedy of her futile existence only temporarily relieved by the excitement of the fire.

Saki allows himself a more direct approach in "'Down Pens'" too while still maintaining the light touch, the excursion into

fantasy and the wit that distinguish all his stories. He returns here to a theme first mooted in "Reginald on Christmas Presents" and one still true today - the empty hypocrisy of much present giving. In writing a succession of insincere 'thank-you' letters for unwanted and unappreciated gifts, Janetta has "'come to the end of my capacity for expressing servile amiability'" (p.363). After fruitless discussion and the "forlorn silence of those who are bereft of hope and have almost ceased to care" (p.365), Egbert has a sudden inspiration, revealed by "the light of battle [...] in his eyes" (p.365). He is going to write to every newspaper proposing a kind of amnesty over the Festive Season, whereby only important correspondence should be dealt with. The problem of presents would be solved by some sort of ticket to acknowledge receipt. "'All you would have to do would be to sign and date the counterfoil, add a conventional hieroglyphic indicating heartfelt thanks and gratified surprise'" (pp.365-6), which Egbert maintains is no "'more perfunctory than the present system'" (p.366). His only cause for regret under this regime would be the loss of the refreshingly candid letters from their blunt Aunt Susan.

"The Feast of Nemesis" goes one step further, actively proposing as an antidote to the meaningless "monotony" (p.319) of celebrating anniversaries that there should be an opportunity "'for demonstrating your feelings towards people whom you simply loathe'" (pp.319-20). Clovis proposes to his aunt that a day should be set aside for settling old scores. "'Of course the thing would have to be done furtively and politely'" (p.320), continues Clovis and suggests digging for truffles on a neighbour's tennis court, or inviting the greedy Agnes Blaik⁵⁸ to a picnic and sending the food off in a different direction, having taken the precaution of having oneself eaten a satisfactory meal before setting out. His aunt, Mrs Thackenbury, obviously warming to the theme, asks what could be done about "'that odious young man, Waldo Plublely'" (p.321). What Clovis has in mind for him is setting fire to a wasp's nest

under a hammock in which he is reposing. And to his aunt's objection that the wasps might sting him to death, the irrepressible Clovis callously replies, "'Waldo is one of those people who would be enormously improved by death'" (p.322).⁵⁹

Those "'little everyday acts of pretended importance'" (p.481) alluded to in "The Mapped Life" might equally apply to the lifestyle of "Judkin of the Parcels".⁶⁰ It is tempting to speculate whether the disappointed Basset Harrowcluff in "Cousin Teresa" might not share a fate similar to that of Judkin. This story is a curious blend of nostalgia and irony, pathos and humour. The figure of Judkin in his "indefinite tweed suit" (p.61) which "would eventually go on to the gardener's boy, and would perhaps fit him" (p.62), is also an object both of respect and pity. The whimsicality of "the dear gods, who know the end before the beginning, were perhaps growing a gardener's boy somewhere to fit the garments" (p.62) redeems parts of this passage from mawkishness.

The mare on its first encounter with him "stared and obviously thought of a curtsy" (p.61), seeing in him the "man of action" he used to be. Saki follows this with a topical joke: "there is no telling what she will pass and what she won't. We call her Redford" (p.61).⁶¹ But on the second encounter the mare "looked straight in front of her" (p.61), having assessed Judkin as merely "a man of activities".⁶² There follows a passage which recreates the kind of life that Judkin in his prime had known, a passage described by Lambert as an "embarrassing outburst".⁶³ Judkin's home life is imagined in starkly contrasting terms, reduced as he is, to "muddy lanes and cheap villas and the marked-down ills of life, to watch pear trees growing" (p.62), an activity which rivals the excitement of rising "early to see if a new strawberry has happened during the night" (p.17) as portrayed by Reginald in "Reginald's Choir Treat".

Judkin's wife is described as perhaps having "had a figure once" (p.62), this partial expression leaving no doubt about her present appearance. Perhaps she still has "a heart of gold - of nine-carat gold" (p.62), Saki adds disparagingly, "but assuredly a soul of tape" (p.62). The kind of conversations which Judkin and his wife might have would resemble the exchanges of the uncle and aunt in "The Mapped Life". For instance, he "will explain how it had fared with him in his dealings" (p.62), the "largeness and lateness [of a vegetable marrow] would be a theme of conversation at luncheon" (p.63). The look of "tedious cheerfulness that might pass for happiness" (p.63) which Judkin habitually wears is a cause of mystification to the narrator. His putative interest in gardening and poultry-keeping and other such trivialities after such an enthralling life is beyond his comprehension. Here is the indisputable evidence of those "dreadful little everyday acts of pretended importance that give the Mappin stamp⁶⁴ to our life" (p.481) encapsulated in the forlorn little sentence which ends this piece: "The basket to be returned" (p.63).

Perhaps the villa occupied by the Momebys in "The Quest" is similar to that of Judkin. In much the same way as in, for instance, "The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope", by his preposterous and unhelpful suggestions, Clovis highlights the superficiality and ineptitude of the Momebys, refusing to take seriously the disappearance of the baby, Erik. As Drake points out he is more interested in what sauce is to be served with the asparagus.⁶⁵

When their neighbour, Rose-Marie Gilpet, assures them that "'it's only lack of faith on your part that prevents him from being restored to you safe and well'" (p.149), as a Christian Scientist she is fair game for Clovis. When not one but two babies are discovered, he tells her, "'Obviously [...] it's a duplicate Erik that your powers of faith called into being'" (p.151), the bland irony of which calls the "She-Wolf" to mind.

As in "Esmé", "The Baker's Dozen" and other stories, the indifference of parents to their children is mocked, in this instance in the inability of the Momebys to recognise their baby. Events have proved that Clovis was justified in discounting the seriousness of the incident as an unnecessary fuss.

By contrast, in "Louise", the mislaying of her niece does not prevent her aunt, Jane Thropplestance, from "making a hearty tea" (p.400). Possibly because she is "chiefly remarkable for being the most absent-minded woman in Middlesex" (p.398) she has come to terms with her shortcomings. She is also aware of her niece's. Louise has "no initiative" (p.399), she has "no conversation" (p.339) and appears to have very little personality or intelligence. As it turns out she has been at home all afternoon reading "'The Faerie Queene'" (p.401), to a maid who has neuralgia, in order to send her to sleep.⁶⁶ In trying to remember where she has left Louise, Jane attempts to retrace her movements of the afternoon, from matching silk, to calling at the Carrywoods, to looking at a church and visiting Ada Spelvexit,⁶⁷ all indicative of the meaningless life that she leads.⁶⁸

James Cushat-Prinkley's⁶⁹ life in "Tea" is equally futile. He is one of Saki's typical creations, a weak, amiable, complacent man, dominated by "his mother, his sisters, an aunt-in-residence, and two or three intimate matronly friends" (p.402), all of whom are engaged in marrying him off. Any "lack of initiative" (p.402) on his part is more than compensated for by these female relations who "far from being inarticulate" (p.402) on the subject settle on "Joan Sebastable as the most suitable young woman" (p.402) of his acquaintance.

The womenfolk have so far organised the courtship satisfactorily, "but the actual proposal would have to be an individual effort" (p.402), which is why James is bound for

Joan's house feeling "moderately complacent" (p.403) as he contemplates the honeymoon in Minorca. Into this mood intrudes the discordant note of a clock striking half-past four, the traditional time for tea and with it all the stifling affectations of "silver kettles and cream jugs and delicate porcelain teacups" (p.403) and "voices tinkling pleasantly in a cascade of solicitous little questions" (p.403). He knows that this will happen not only from experience but because he "had read of such things in scores of novels" (p.403), a taste he shares with Alethia Debchance in "Forewarned".

James has an unexpected and unvoiced preference for a very different scene in which the main ingredients are divans, silken curtains, Nubian slaves and blessed silence or "looking unutterable thoughts" (p.403). Wisely he has remained reticent about this vision in the presence of his mother but his aversion to the ritual of tea as he knows it drives him to seek a brief respite by visiting his distant cousin Rhoda Ellam, who in making hats for a living "appeared to find life amusing and to have a fairly good time in spite of her straitened circumstances" (p.404). She is having a "'picnic meal'" (p.404) in which he is invited to join, without having to undergo all the unnecessary ritual preliminaries which are anathema to him. Not only does she "cut the bread-and-butter with a masterly skill" and produce "red pepper and sliced lemon where so many women would merely have produced reasons and regrets for not having any" (p.404) (as in "The Sex That Doesn't Shop"), but she talks entertainingly too, as the expression "'we live in a series of rushes - like the infant Moses'" (p.405) serves to illustrate.

So enchanted is James by this Bohemian lifestyle which promises to chime so satisfactorily with his own unarticulated longings, that he impulsively proposes marriage to Rhoda instead of Joan. Initially his family are disconcerted "to have to deflect their enthusiasm at a moment's notice from Joan Sebastable to Rhoda

Ellam" (p.405) but they concede that James's "tastes had some claim to be considered" (p.405). This one crucial instance of James's initiative is not to have the happy consequences he expects, however, as the last scene at tea reveals. He has been deceived by appearances into thinking that Rhoda was a truly independent woman, the exception to the rule, when it was merely necessity and not inclination which dictated the Bohemian lifestyle which so captivated him.

Another elaborately futile existence is portrayed in "The Philanthropist and the Happy Cat", which Lambert perceptively describes as "an unexpectedly subtle study of the social and sexual frustrations of a young woman of the prosperous middle class".⁷⁰ Jocantha complacently surveys her appearance, her husband and her lifestyle and concludes, "'I don't suppose a more thoroughly contented personality is to be found in all Chelsea'" (p.381), adding as an afterthought, "'except perhaps Attab'" (p.381), the cat who "'lies there, purring and dreaming, shifting his limbs now and then in an ecstasy of cushioned comfort'" (p.381). This is how he spends his sensual days and at night "'he goes out into the garden with a red glint in his eyes"⁷¹ and slays a drowsy sparrow'" (p.381).

It is this element which causes a tiny seed of dissatisfaction in Jocantha's assessment of her lot. As her husband, Gregory, bids Jocantha "a playfully affectionate good-bye" (p.382) when she would perhaps have preferred a more passionate one, she reminds him archly that "dinner's a wee bit earlier tonight" (p.382). She continues her reverie "with placid introspective eyes" (p.382) but already she has adjusted her feeling of complacency to admit "if she had not everything she wanted in this world, at least she was very well pleased with what she had got" (p.382), which leads to the contemplation of her material possessions.⁷²

"From being in a mood of simmering satisfaction [...] she passed to the phase of being generously commiserating" (p.382), and

sets out for an afternoon's "desultory shopping" (p.382) with the aim of doing something "on the spur of the moment" (p.382), a contrived spontaneity which might add a little zest to the drab lives of the working girls who belong to that "class that have neither the happy go lucky freedom of the poor" (p.382) as Saki ironically puts it, nor the "leisured freedom of the rich" (p.382). She casts herself in the romantic role of "Fairy Godmother" (p.383), buys a ticket for a controversial play and goes to a teashop to look for a likely recipient of her largesse.

A girl "with tired, listless eyes and a general air of uncomplaining forlornness" (p.383) attracts her notice. "Obviously she supplied excellent material for Jocantha's first experiment in haphazard benefaction" (p.383). In trying to catch the girl's attention, however, she is disconcerted to see that "the girl's face lit up with sudden pleasure, her eyes sparkled, a flush came into her cheeks, and she looked almost pretty" (p.383), and this is not in Jocantha's script. Nor is the reason for this transformation: a young man, "very much better looking than Gregory" (pp.383-84). Jocantha's attention immediately switches to the boy, though she deludes herself that her interest is that of a benefactress seeking to improve his humdrum life. She has decided to give the theatre ticket to him, but her fantasy has already carried her beyond that. "If he was a nice boy and improved on acquaintance he could be given more theatre tickets and perhaps asked to come one Sunday to tea in Chelsea. Jocantha made up her mind that he would improve on acquaintance" (p.384). The fact that "he was exactly the type that Jocantha admired [...] of course was accident" (p.384). Saki piles irony upon irony.

The girl leaves and Jocantha sets about attracting the young man's notice but so immersed is he in his book that she succeeds only in making a fool of herself. On her return home, her mood is markedly different from when she set out. She is thoroughly

discontented. Her house appears to her "dull and over-furnished. She had a resentful conviction that Gregory would be uninteresting at dinner and that the play would be stupid after dinner" (p.385); her petulance is evident. Attab by contrast is the epitome of "purring complacency" (p.385) but then as Saki succinctly ends the story, "he had killed his sparrow" (p.385).⁷³ What has started out as an exercise in condescension has had the unwelcome effect of opening Jocantha's eyes to the less than satisfactory superficial nature of her lifestyle.

If Jocantha leads a rarefied existence, it is as nothing to that of Alethia Debchance in "Forewarned". Described by May as "brought up in fiction, [she] encountered life",⁷⁴ Alethia is the female equivalent of Theodoric Voler who, having led an equally sheltered life, occupies a railway carriage en route to her first "social adventure" (p.441). In living in a secluded hamlet, amongst elderly neighbours, the only newspapers she has read "were devoted exclusively either to religion or poultry, and the world of politics was to her an unheeded unexplored region" (p.441), a point which proves crucial at a later stage in the story.

All her ideas have been gleaned from novels of the sort written by Augustus Mellowkent in "Mark" and this is abundantly illustrated throughout. Her aunt has died leaving her well off financially but alone in the world apart from some distant cousins in Ceylon "a locality about which she knew little, beyond the assurance contained in the missionary hymn that the human element there was vile" (pp.441-42),⁷⁵ and other cousins in the Midlands. Over the past few years the latter "had expressed a polite wish that she should pay them a visit" (p.442) and their note of condolence on her aunt's death "had included a vague hope" (p.442) that Alethia would visit them.

She knows nothing about them except that the two daughters have left home to be married, old Mrs Bludward is a semi-invalid and

the son, Robert, is hoping to be an M.P. "Her imagination, founded on her extensive knowledge of the people one met in novels, had to supply the gaps" (p.442). The stereotypes which she describes are amusing. Either the old lady will be "ultra amiable [...] bearing her feeble health with uncomplaining fortitude, and having a kind word for the gardener's boy" (p.462) [a type obviously and perhaps only to be met with in the pages of fiction] "or else she would be cold and peevish, with eyes that pierced you like a gimlet" (p.442). As it turns out, "Mrs Bludward proved to be of the type that Alethia had suspected, thin-lipped, cold-eyed and obviously devoted to her worthless son" (p.445), which confirms her worst fears.

Robert is more difficult to predict. He might be like a "Hugo, who was strong, good and beautiful, a rare type" (p.442), or like "Sir Jasper, who was utterly vile and absolutely unscrupulous" (p.442). "Nevil who was not really bad at heart, but had a weak mouth" (p.442) is the most likely. The nature of the novels she has read is made clear from this and in her expectations of meeting "undesirable adventuresses" or "reckless admiration-seeking women" (p.442). While excited at the prospect Alethia is filled with such trepidation that she wishes that "she could have taken the vicar with her" (p.443).

She is far from reassured on overhearing the conversation of two farmers who enter her compartment and describe Robert as an "out-an'-out rotter" (p.443) who "was hissed down at Shoalford yesterday" (p.443). To Alethia this is a "dramatically biblical" (p.445) disgrace which immediately calls to mind two more of the sensational romances which represent her entire experience of life. As she observes to herself in tones of breathless horror, "in placid Saxon-blooded England people did not demonstrate their feelings lightly and without some strong compelling cause" (p.444). Then she reads a newspaper article which describes Robert as "an unscrupulous, unprincipled character [...] responsible for most of the misery, disease,

poverty, and ignorance with which the country was afflicted" (p.444). She recognises him as the Sir Jasper type with "the dark beetling brows, the quick, furtive glance, the sneering, unsavoury smile that always characterized the Sir Jaspers of this world" (p.444). Robert, in fact, to her considerable surprise "was fair with a snub nose, merry eye, and rather a schoolboy manner" (p.444), but Alethia's convictions are not to be shaken so easily by appearances. In fact, shortly after meeting him she "thought she heard a furtive hiss" (p.445). Again the words "furtive" and "eyes" draw attention to deceptive appearances and lack of judgement.

In pinning her hopes on Robert's rival, Sir John Chobham, she is to be further disillusioned, however, since he is described by a rival newspaper in identically derogatory terms as those berating Robert. On reading this, "the colour ebbed away from her face, a look of frightened despair crept into her eyes" (p.446); nothing she has read has prepared her for a world in which there are only villains and no heroes. Having spent the night barricaded into her room to such effect "that the maid had great difficulty in breaking in with the early tea in the morning" (p.445), Alethia decides that desperate measures are called for and pretends that she has had a telegram calling her home. As she confesses to herself, "It was dreadful to have to concoct lies, but it would be more dreadful to have to spend another night under that roof" (p.446). Safely back in the world of novels Alethia congratulates herself on having survived her experience of "the world outside Webblehinton, the world where the great dramas of sin and villainy are played unceasingly" (pp.446-47).

Literal-mindedness of a different sort occurs in "The Jestings of Arlington Stringham" in which Eleanor's mother has no imagination and very little intelligence. The empty lives, humdrum routines and lack of purpose are revealed in the dialogue between mother and daughter which results from the

unaccustomed joke that Arlington has made in the House of Commons. "'In all the years we've been married neither of us has made jokes, and I don't like it now'" (p.133), confides Eleanor to her mother in a manner which recalls J.P. Huddle in "The Unrest-Cure".⁷⁶ Eleanor adds, "'I'm afraid it's the beginning of the rift in the lute,'" (p.133), which prompts her mother to inquire, "'What lute?'" The answer that it is a quotation⁷⁷ "was an excellent method, in Eleanor's eyes, for withdrawing it from discussion" (p.133).

Two days later Arlington makes a remark to his wife which evokes the condemnation, "'That's very modern, and I daresay very clever'" (p.133) which is reminiscent of the humourless Mrs Quabarl.⁷⁸ She adds in the ensuing silence which further nettles her, "'You had better tell it to Lady Isobel'" (p.134) who, clearly a very advanced and independent person, "was seen everywhere with a fawn-coloured collie at a time when every one else kept nothing but Pekinese" (p.134) and who obviously poses a threat to Eleanor's peace of mind.⁷⁹ As she feels more alienated from her husband she tells her mother, "'The rift is widening to an abyss'" (p.134), which causes her mother "after long reflection" (p.134) to remark, "'I should not tell that to anyone'" (p.134), adding in explanation, "'you can't have an abyss in a lute. There isn't room'" (p.134).

The trivialities which occupy Eleanor and her like are illustrated in the next paragraph when the wrong library book is brought to her. Instead of the latest sensational novel, "the book which every one denied having read" (p.134), she is confronted by a book of nature writings. "When one had been prepared to plunge with disapproving mind into a regrettable chronicle of ill-spent lives it was intensely irritating to read 'the dainty yellow-hammers are now with us, and flaunt their jaundiced livery from every bush and hillock'" (p.134),⁸⁰ a parody which reveals Eleanor's hypocrisy. She is plainly as

literal-minded as her mother in observing to herself, "the thing was so obviously untrue; either there must be hardly any bushes or hillocks in those parts or the country must be fearfully overstocked with yellow-hammers" (p.134), an observation worthy of Reginald's Duchess.

Significantly Eleanor also feels, "The thing scarcely seemed worth telling such a lie about" (p.134), which amply illustrates the part that truth plays in her life. The boy who has brought the wrong book, "she would have liked to have whipped [...] long and often. It was perhaps the yearning of a woman who had no children of her own" (p.134), Saki cynically and perhaps feelingly observes.

At dinner that night, a meal attended by Clovis and "the odious Bertie van Tahn" (p.135),⁸¹ Arlington says, "'X [...] has the soul of a meringue'" (p.135), to which Eleanor's mother predictably objects, "'Meringues haven't got souls'" (p.135). Clovis briefly redeems the conversation from banality by the addition of one or two fanciful remarks and Eleanor feels temporarily closer to Arlington again when he criticises the curry which she feels to be more characteristic of him.

But shortly after, Arlington makes another joke in the House which prompts the reiterated comment from Eleanor that "'it's very modern and I suppose very clever'" (p.136)⁸² to which her friend Gertrude Ilpton replies disconcertingly, "'Of course it's clever [...] all Lady Isobel's sayings are clever, and luckily they bear repeating'" (p.136). When Eleanor dies "from an overdose of chloral" (p.136) there is much "unobtrusive speculation. Clovis, who perhaps exaggerated the importance of curry in the home, hinted at domestic sorrow" (p.136). This ironic conclusion shows much the same perception as revealed by Clovis in "The Brogue".

Judging by appearances has equally tragic consequences in the case of "The Lost Sanjak". The scene is a prison cell where the

condemned man is recounting to the Prison Chaplain the bizarre events which have led to his death sentence. In being condemned to death "'in expiation of the murder of myself, which murder never took place, and of which, in any case, I am necessarily innocent'" (p.54) he claims he has been "'a victim to a lack of specialization'" (p.49),⁸³ a theme which Saki returns to in different guises throughout the stories.

The convict's personality has been at fault all along. He acts impulsively and randomly so that the series of accidents are largely of his own making, in which respect he resembles Martin Stoner in "The Hounds of Fate". Having fallen in love for no particular reason with the doctor's wife and been rebuffed, he feels that he must make himself scarce, since that seems to be the acceptable form "'in novels and plays I knew'" (p.50), though he has no idea how to go about it. He happens on the corpse of a Salvation Army officer who seems to have been the victim of a road accident, and decides to change clothes with him as a favourable "'opportunity for losing my identity and passing out of the life of the doctor's wife for ever'" (p.50) with the minimum of fuss.

But the troubles he brings upon himself by his impulsive action are far worse, for the following day he reads in a newspaper "'the announcement of my own murder at the hands of some person unknown'" (p.51). Ironically "'the deed was ascribed to a wandering Salvationist [...] who had been seen lurking in the roadway near the scene of the crime'" (p.51). The conclusion to which he jumps amply illustrates to what extent he is the victim of his own folly. "'What I had mistaken for a motor accident was evidently a case of savage assault and murder'" (p.51). The full implications of this remark highlight Saki's subtlety in compressing so many different factors into one short sentence: the absurdly false logic, the facile judging according to circumstantial evidence, the irredeemable weakness of character thus revealed.

The man has two problems now - to establish his own identity, but without involving the doctor's wife, and to get rid of his incriminating disguise. It becomes plain from "stares, nudgings, whisperings and even loud-spoken remarks of 'that's 'im'" (p.51) and people "furtively watching" (p.51) him that he has been identified as the wanted Salvationist, the reason for his continued freedom being linked with blood-hound trials in which he is the quarry. Even the dogs in this story are incompetent, since if he had not idiotically stooped to pat one on the head he is "'not sure that they would have taken any notice of me'" (p.52).

When he is brought to justice events further conspire against him. An aunt of the dead Salvationist readily identifies him as her depraved nephew, and to make matters worse, in trying "to demonstrate that my learning was on altogether another plane" (p.53) from the "veneer of cheap modern education" (p.53) of the Salvationist he fails test after test. As a self-professed expert on the Balkan Crisis, but without the advantage of a hasty brushing up of the subject, everything hinges finally on his knowing the whereabouts of Novibazar,⁸⁴ the lost Sanjak of the title, and he gets it wrong.

What adds to the irony of this story is the uneasiness experienced throughout by the chaplain who clearly suffers from a "lack of specialization" (p.49) too. His first action after the man has been hanged is to look up the "Times Atlas" (p.54) since after all, "'a thing like that [...] might happen to any one'" (p.54). The absurdity of this story with its false logic, the elaborate futility of action and outcome, the inverted sense of values, all invite the reader to examine appearances more closely.

"The Veiled Vote"

A handful of stories use the device of 'reductio ad absurdum' to ridicule women's suffrage too. Among them, "A Young Turkish

Catastrophe" which makes much use of punning word play to humorous effect, is also a satire on the politics of expediency. The same minister who said, "'Women have no souls and no intelligence; why on earth should they have votes?'" (p.60)⁸⁵ capitulates when he is told, "'It would be to the liking of the Young Turkish Party'" (p.60). At the closely contested election it is therefore a fitting irony that the candidate for the Young Turkish party should be ousted by the "Veiled Vote" (p.61), an unforeseen part of the secret ballot. His rival, Ali the Blest, has several hundred wives and mistresses, whose alternative to voting for him is to be drowned in the Bosphorus.

In similar vein is "Hermann the Irascible - A Story of the Great Weep", where the solution to women's suffrage is to oblige women to vote at every election no matter how trivial, with financial penalties for failure to do so. Hermann "was one of the unexpected things that happen in politics, and he happened with great thoroughness" (p.125) which accounts for his revolutionary "Compulsory Female Franchise" (p.125). This proves so inconvenient that "the most fanatical Suffragettes began to wonder what they had found so attractive in the prospect of putting ballot-papers into a box" (p.125). Ironically "The No-Votes-for-Women League" (p.126) formed in desperation by millions of women as frantic for disenfranchisement as they were to acquire the vote adopt equally violent measures but to no avail; until they "hit upon an expedient which it was strange that no one had thought of before. The Great Weep was organised" (p.126). This farcical ploy, wherein thousands of women take it in turns to weep openly and publicly, prevails and the king agrees to pass a bill depriving women of the vote. Hermann who was not for nothing "also nicknamed the Wise" (p.127) has engineered the outcome, as the last sentence reveals. This solution to the suffragette menace is humane compared to the Emperor's in "The Gala Programme", where

Placidus Superbus orders the "menagerie dens" (p.551) to be opened and the wild animals loosed on the women.

"The Threat" is another satire on women's suffrage this time in the form of a conversation between Sir Lulworth Quayne and his nephew. Clovis-like, Sir Lulworth celebrates by the use of colourful anecdotes "one of the most dramatic reforms" (p.462) of recent times. In describing a Suffragette atrocity in which thousands of parrots are loosed on a Royal procession, the "additional language" (p.462) which the parrots acquire during their recapture and which unfits "them for further service in the Suffragette cause" (p.462) is, of course, left to the imagination. The next atrocity is the destruction of several hundred pictures on the first day of the exhibition at the Royal Academy, but this is counter-productive since "the drastic weeding out of a few hundred canvases was regarded as a positive improvement" (p.463).

Whatever the women try seems doomed to failure and it is left to the ingenuity of a man to come up with a truly effective stratagem. That the man is "Waldo Orpington [...] a frivolous little fool who chirrup[s] at drawing-room concerts and can recognise bits from different composers without referring to the programme" (p.463)⁸⁶ is, by extension, an indication of the opinion that Sir Lulworth has of Suffragettes. At a whist drive Lena Dubarri, the prime mover of this new plan, reveals to the Prime Minister that they have been collecting money to build replicas of the "Victoria Memorial" (p.465) to be erected at strategic sites. So appalled is the Prime Minister at this prospect that the Suffragettes have the satisfaction of stampeding him into "panic legislation" (p.465). Unfortunately for them, however, it does not take the form of conferring votes on women but, as revealed in the last sentence, "an act which made it a penal offence to erect commemorative statuary anywhere within three miles of a public highway" (p.465). True to form the elaborate plans are of no avail.

"Not a Biyelka"

So all-pervasive are the animals that stalk Saki's pages⁸⁷ that it would be wrong not to look at a few stories in this chapter on "elaborate futilities" where it is an animal that ruffles the calm. In "The Bag"⁸⁸ Vladimir as a foreigner is bewildered by all the fuss when he is suspected by Norah of having shot a fox by mistake; and his lack of comprehension draws attention to the essentially idiotic nature of the obsessions of Mrs Hoopington and Major Pallaby and the rest.

Unnerved by Norah's panic reaction, Vladimir botches his attempt to conceal the incriminating game-bag and it is left dangling like a sword of Damocles from an antler fixed to the wall above the tea table, which accounts for his "scared, miserable eyes" (p.78) and Norah not daring to raise "her eyes above the level of the tea table" (p.78). When the dog shatters the silence by barking at the game-bag, "a simultaneous idea flashed on himself [the Major] and Mrs Hoopington [...] and with one accusing voice they screamed, "'You've shot the fox!'" (p.79). In leaping to the same conclusions as Norah, the Major's fury is likened to "a destroying angel" (p.79) and an "imprisoned cyclone" (p.80) while Mrs Hoopington's "shrill monotone" (p.80) when the Major leaves is like "a rather tame thunderstorm" (p.80) after a "Wagner opera" (p.80), as she sees her marriage prospects evaporate. In the last scene (reminiscent of the burial of the kitten in "The Penance"), comes the surprise ending when "in the dusk of a November evening the Russian boy [...] gave hasty but decent burial to a large polecat under the lilac tree at Hoopington" (p.80). Even a dead animal has the power of total disruption in a Saki story.

In a great number of stories animals act in such a way as to discomfit humans, sometimes like Tobermory, for instance, as superior to them, sometimes as an extension of human agency as for example, in "The Boar-Pig"; but in the case of "The Bull",

"The Stalled Ox", "The Brogue" and "The Mouse" amongst others, they act in a perfectly natural way, but are just as potent a force in upsetting the superficial order of things.

Just as Basset Harrowcluff in "Cousin Teresa" despises his half-brother Lucas, so Tom Yorkfield, the stolid, earnest farmer in "The Bull", has little time for his effete, artistic half-brother, Laurence. In showing his indifference to Tom's pride and joy, the bull 'Clover Fairy', despite Tom's attempt to appreciate Laurence's artistic efforts, and in the added insult of having one of his bland paintings of a Hereford bull bought for three times the price Tom could hope to get for his real animal, "the patronizing, self-satisfied Laurence" (p.489) drives him beyond endurance. Unable to articulate his outrage and goaded by "the united force of truth and slander" (p.490), Tom grabs hold of Laurence who slips and goes "scudding and squawking across the enclosure" (p.490) to the irritation of the bull, who completes Laurence's indignity by tossing him over his shoulder. Thus the values are restored, Tom being superior to Laurence in his ability to admit the truth to himself and in a generosity of nature which Laurence lacks.

Another cattle painter features in "The Stalled Ox" where the polite reticence of Theophil Eshley is no match for his vituperative neighbour Adela Pingsford. Eshley, the sort of painter disparaged by Reginald in "Reginald on the Academy", paints infinite variations on a theme of "'Noontide Peace', a study of two dun cows under a walnut tree" (p.345), and it is to him that Adela turns for help when an ox gets into her garden. When Eshley "blankly and rather fatuously" (p.345) (like an Octavian Ruttle perhaps) asks what kind of ox it is and how it got there, Adela releases a stream of invective. She is further incensed by his ineffectual attempts to incite the animal to move, observing cuttingly, "If any hens should ever stray into my garden [...] I should certainly send for you to frighten them out. You 'shoo' beautifully" (p.346);⁸⁹ and is driven to use

"language that sent the artist instinctively [...] nearer to the ox" (p.347).

Unfortunately his best attempts only succeed in driving the beast into her morning-room, where it proceeds to demolish the flower arrangements. Eshley, however, "fancied that the beginnings of a hunted look had come into its eyes" (p.347) and he feels that discretion is called for. Adela is beside herself with rage by now and suggests scathingly, "'Perhaps you'd like to do a nice sketch of that ox making itself at home in my morning-room'" (p.347); which is just what Eshley does. He paints a picture entitled, "'Ox in a Morning-room, Late Autumn'" (p.348), (similar to the pictures of Gebhard in "On Approval") which makes his reputation, the invasion of the ox being the necessary catalyst to bring out Eshley's manly qualities, just as the assuming of the persona of "Mark" makes a man of Mellowkent.

An equally formidable woman dominates "The Elk",⁹⁰ this time in the person of the rich and redoubtable Teresa Thropplestance,⁹¹ whose "manner suggested a blend between a Mistress of the Robes and a Master of Fox-hounds" (p.358). Her sole "heir-designate" (p.358) is Bertie "who was quite ready to marry any one who was favourably recommended to his notice, but he was not going to waste his time in falling in love with anyone who would come under his grandmother's veto" (pp.358-59). The story then revolves round the match-making bids of daughters and mothers and the intractability of Teresa.

Mrs Yonelet, the latest in a long series of maternal aspirants, thinks that she has the prize within her grasp when the 'tame' elk in the park near the Thropplestance mansion where she is spending Christmas attacks her daughter Dora. She dashes into the drawing-room "eyes blazing with excitement" (p.360) and announces, "'Bertie has saved Dora from the elk!'" (p.360) "'Fate has consecrated them for one another'" (p.361). Teresa, however, is unimpressed, informing her that Dora's is merely one

of a long series of such episodes. She puts Mrs Yonelet even more firmly in her place by telling her that in any case by these reckonings the gardener's boy ought to have the right of first refusal, and that destroying the elk would be out of the question since as she pointed out to the mother of the gardener's boy, "'she had eleven children and I had only one elk'" (p.361).⁹²

Later the vicar's wife, speaking "with the quiet authority of one who has intuitive knowledge" (p.362), predicts that it is a German governess who will marry Bertie. "'Next to Teresa she's about the most assertive and combative personality in the neighbourhood'" (p.362) which will guarantee Teresa's approval of her as a fitting successor at the Hall. Unexpectedly it is Dora Yonelet who carries off Bertie when the elk kills the governess and is itself destroyed, a double blow which Teresa does not long survive. This "irony of its fate" (p.362) accomplishes what no amount of plotting has been able to do.

Matchmaking is the theme of "The Brogue" too. The Brogue in question is a horse, originally named Berserker⁹³ but renamed "in recognition of the fact that, once acquired it was extremely difficult to get rid of" (p.250). This unpredictable animal is owned by the widowed Mrs Mullet, her son Toby, and her clutch of daughters. Finally succeeding in selling the horse to her unwitting neighbour Mr Penricarde, however, unexpectedly finds her distraught. It appears that Mr Penricarde is interested in her daughter Jessie, and as she "partially" expresses herself to Clovis, "'I've got a houseful of daughters [...] and I've been trying - well, not to get them off my hands, of course, but a husband or two wouldn't be amiss among the lot of them'" (p.252). She enlists Clovis's help in solving the problem of the Brogue which she is afraid will kill her prospective son-in-law or, at the very least, put him off marrying her daughter, which is her prime concern.

Jessie, a brisk young woman, announces to her mother the following day, after a round of golf with Penricarde, "'It's all right about the proposal [...] he came out with it at the sixth hole. I said I must have time to think it over. I accepted him at the seventh'" (p.252). When her mother admonishes her for her lack of "'maidenly reserve and hesitation'" (p.253) - it seems she should have waited till the ninth hole - Jessie replies, "'The seventh is a very long hole'" (p.253).

Everything is cut and dried with her in a way reminiscent of Emily in "The Baker's Dozen", down to the honeymoon in Corsica and the choice of her mother's wedding outfit. But she is anxious about her fiancé's ability to control the Brogue. His experience of riding so far has been limited to an animal "'accustomed to carrying octogenarians and people undergoing rest cures'" (p.253). She adds absurdly, "'I shall be a widow before I'm married, and I do so want to see what Corsica's like; it looks so silly on the map'" (p.253), which is a fair indication of her sense of priorities.

After several wild suggestions about how to deal with the situation, including a pretended "Suffragette outrage" (p.252),⁹⁴ Clovis devises a plan which seems foolproof, but even he cannot control the weather and Mr Penricarde rides the Brogue for the first time. He is bruised and shaken but "good-naturedly ascribed the accident to his own inexperience with horses and country roads" (p.254). The wedding goes ahead as planned with nothing more said about the Brogue, and this polite reticence on the part of all concerned is only mildly questioned at the end by Clovis. Included in the list of wedding presents is "'The Brogue', bridegroom's gift to bride" (p.254) which Toby thinks proves that Penricarde suspects nothing. But Clovis has another more sinister interpretation. It could after all indicate "'that he has a very pleasing wit'" (p.254).

Thus from the irreverent nonsense of Reginald, the diplomatic reticence of the ultra-refined hypocrites, the posturings of the

pseudo-intellectuals, the outspoken and outrageous Clovis and his like, reticence gives way to invective, animals upset plans and absurdity fractures social poise. It is the "pretended importance" (p.481) and "the powers of self-deception" (p.480) that are the crimes constantly under attack in the parade of foibles in these stories. The Reginalds, Sir Lulworths, Veras, and Clovises all conspire to pierce such armour and in his attack on "conventional make-believe" (p.482) it is the conventional element which Saki considers to be pernicious.

Notes

1 Elizabeth Drew, *Atlantic Monthly*, p.98, quotes this passage, singling out "Lucas Basset" in "Cousin Teresa", for special mention, but mistakenly attributes the remark to Comus Bassington. She means Lucas Harrowcluff, of course.

2 "Reginald in Russia" (1910), "The Chronicles of Clovis" (1911), "Beasts and Superbeasts" (1914), "The Toys of Peace" (1923), and "The Square Egg" (1924). The dates refer to the first publication of the collections and not to the individual stories within them.

3 Benny Green, "Paper-Thin", *Spectator*, 245 (November 22, 1980), p.24.

4 *The Saturday Book*, 20, 61-73.

5 William E. Chapman, 'Aspects of Literary Dandyism from 1881: Wilde, Beerbohm and Saki' (Unpublished B.Litt. dissertation, Oxford, 1978), p.43, states, "Clovis and Reginald are exquisite young men [...] Life they regard as something to be lived consciously and with style".

6 Review in *Bystander*, October 18, 1911, p.134, entitled "'Saki' Stories: The Chronicles of Clovis" and signed "V.C." Vivian Carter was editor of the *Bystander* at that time.

7 Chapman, op. cit., p.135, believes this lie of Reginald's may contain "an echo of Wilde's lie, about his age, when on oath, at his first trial".

8 It is interesting to note that in the much later story, "The Mapped Life", the niece in drawing a parallel with the animals says that we have "this difference in our disfavour, that the animals are there to be looked at, while nobody wants to look at us" (p.480).

9 Op.cit., p.132.

10 Fogle in "Saki and Wodehouse" says, "The Duchess has pretensions, and is therefore hopelessly handicapped" (p.84).

11 "Biography" in *The Square Egg*, p.7: "Without any sense of humour whatever, she was the funniest story-teller I've ever met. She was a colossal humbug, and never knew it".

12 "Saki", *New Statesman*, p.416.

13 Clovis's drama in "The Peace Offering" has marked similarities, pp.179-84.

14 Charles Jamrach, described in Ritvo's *The Animal Estate* as "the most extensive dealer in wild animals in Victorian Britain" (p.225), managed "the largest and most renowned wild animal shop in Victorian London [...] from 1840 until his death in 1891" (p.244).

15 Compare this with "The League of the Poor Brave Things" in "The Woman who Never Should" by Saki in *Westminster Gazette*, July, 22, 1902, pp.1-2.

16 The language of the "Austrian Reichsrath" is cited in "The Oversight" also, p.515, a comic reference to its multi-lingual composition.

17 In "The Oversight", for instance, Lloyd George is described by Mrs Walters as "an Antelope" and when pressed, "'Well, not an antelope exactly, but something with horns and hoofs and tail'" (p.514).

18 J. W. Lambert, "Introduction", *The Bodley Head Saki* (London: Bodley Head, 1963), p.39.

19 As Cheikin also notes, "Saki; Practical Jokes as a Clue to Comedy", p.121.

20 'Development of Method and Meaning...', pp.77-81.

21 A refuge established for the destitute by Lord Montague Rowton (1838-1903), a Victorian philanthropist. Mention is also made in "Bertie's Christmas Eve" of "a Rowton House for the vagrant rats of the neighbourhood" (p.439).

22 According to Brewer, a tenth-century archbishop of Mainz noted for his oppression of the poor, and reputed in time of famine to have assembled them in a barn and burned them to death. An army of mice attacked and devoured him. Southey wrote a ballad about him.

23 Subtitled "A Light-Fingered Trifle" in *Bystander*, December 6, 1911, pp.523-24, 526. The most famous kleptomaniac of the day was allegedly none other than Queen Mary.

24 This theme of autogenic punishment occurs in such stories as "The Lumber-Room", where the aunt is on "self-imposed sentry-duty for the greater part of the afternoon" (p.373).

25 An example of double standards as in "The Way to the Dairy".

26 The silly name, "Pigeoncote", is clever for two reasons: it calls to mind the word "dovecote" but without any of the associations of the word "dove", while the word "pigeon" is slang for a dupe.

27 This same Mrs Packletide appears also in "Mrs Packletide's Tiger" and "The Recessional". The spasmodic reappearance of the same characters throughout the stories has the effect of establishing a kind of mythology, or at least the sense of their belonging to some sort of club of which the reader is also a privileged member.

28 He is described thus also in "The Jestings of Arlington Stringham", p.135.

29 Just as he did the address of J.P. Huddle in "The Unrest-Cure".

30 A remedy repeated with a minor variation in *The Watched Pot*, p.922. The significance of the oak has already been discussed in Chapter One, page 23.

31 Unlike the wise Reggie Bruttle who took ingenious precautions against such an eventuality in "Excepting Mrs Pentherby".

32 A reference to the Balkan War.

33 Clearly this is a favourite expression of Saki's at that time, appearing also in "The Almanack" in *Morning Post*, June 17, 1913: "As your mother says, you are a mass of selfishness" (L.p.296). "A Housing Problem" appeared in *Bystander*, July 9, 1913, pp.60, 62.

34 Not included in *The Complete Saki* but contained in *Methuen's Annual*, 1914, pp.39-45. See Appendix B.

35 An echo of the girl's opinion of the bachelor's story about the wolf in "The Story-Teller": "'it is the most beautiful story that I ever heard'" (p.351).

36 Charles Maude, with whom Saki collaborated according to a note by Ethel Munro which prefaces *The Watched Pot*, pp.865-66. This version, a revision of the original, was completed in 1914.

37 Emylyn Williams, "Preface", *Saki: Short Stories* (London: Dent, 1978), pp.11-13.

38 His two one-act plays, "The Death-Trap" (pp.845-50) and "Karl-Ludwig's Window" (pp.853-861), melodramas which date from his early days as war correspondent, feature together with *The Watched Pot* after his two novels, *The Unbearable Bassington* and *When William Came*.

39 "Not for much money would I have such death-music" (p.414).

40 "'Conscience makes cowboys of us all'" (p.154), a joke repeated in *The Watched Pot*, p.896.

41 It is probably no coincidence that George Moore had written a novel entitled *Sister Teresa* which was published in 1909.

42 W.D. Copley, "The Tales of Saki", p.227.

43 The rather discordant anti-Semitic references are in Saki's time no more significant or objectionable than his anti-American or anti-*nouveau riche* comments which to him are all part of the same equation, and which need give no more offence than the anti-Suffragette remarks should to today's feminists.

44 A.A. Milne quotes this as an example of felicitous expression in his "Introduction", *The Chronicles of Clovis* (London: John Lane, 1931), p.xii, saying, "'Locate' is the pleasant word here".

45 "Bertie van Tahn was responsible for the legend that its spout had to be kept facing north during the process of infusion" (p.304).

46 Like Eleanor Saxelby in "The Stake", "whose eyes had been straying restlessly towards the mantelpiece" (p.335).

47 *Sumurun*, a popular musical play of the time ("The Peace Offering" appeared in *Bystander*, June 7, 1911), is mentioned twice in *Bystander*, October 18, 1911: pp.123 (a page of cartoons) and 135 (a review); and again on May 14, 1913, p.336, with an accompanying photograph of an actress in a stagey pose: "Everybody is glad to see *Sumurun* back at the Coliseum". But the review continues: "we have progressed much since its first appearance two or three years ago. Indeed, the whole of the Russian ballet movement has intervened, and, to tell the truth, Bakst has rather spoiled us for Reinhardt".

48 Who "spoke of several duchesses as if he knew them - in his more inspired moments almost as if they knew him" (p.87).

49 Lulu is mentioned also in *The Watched Pot* by the imperious Hortensia Bavvel as "not a person whose behaviour or opinions will be taken as a pattern at Briony as long as I am mistress here" (p.914).

50 An allusion to the man responsible for fitting out the Spanish Armada.

51 Egbert and his uncle, Sir Lulworth, also appear in "Laura", at another funeral.

52 The June 5th, 1912 edition of *Bystander* was a special Paris number "Written, Illustrated and Produced During a Visit to Paris by the Editor and Staff", p.479.

53 *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, p.388: "In "The Mapped Life" it is the polite fictions of civilization" that are under attack.

54 'Saki: A Literary and Critical Study', p.77.

55 "Saki: Practical Jokes", p.123, as applied to his use of practical jokes.

56 In Regent's Park (London) Zoo, designed by the architect J.J. Joass (1868-1952), friend of J. Newton Mappin (of Mappin and Webb, Jewellers) who unfortunately died before the official opening in 1913. The terraces were specially designed not only to give the illusion of freedom and 'the wild' but arranged in such a way that the viewing masses were unaware of each other.

57 Katrakis, 'The Satiric Art...', p.92, says, "The story takes the form of a discussion between Mrs James Gurtleberry and her niece Vera. Munro obviously uses Vera as a mouthpiece for airing his philosophies". Unfortunately Vera's name is not mentioned in this story.

58 Who appears also in "The Strategist".

59 This is the view of René in *The Watched Pot* when he talks of Sparrowby, p.930.

60 Appearing originally as "The Man of the Parcels" in *Westminster Gazette*, Oct.29, 1902, p.3. Katrakis in her chapter entitled "Chronological Development of the Short Stories", p.61, says, "another theme of importance in Munro's later work [...] is his contempt for routine and mundane living", unfortunately adding that "this idea is expanded in a number of Munro's later stories, such as 'Judkin of the Parcels' from 'The Chronicles of Clovis'", presumably taking the date of the collection (1911) as the date of the individual stories.

61 An ex-bank manager turned Lord Chamberlain whose job it was to censor plays and who had the reputation of being very arbitrary.

62 Just as in "Cousin Teresa", Basset's is "the contempt of the man of action for the man of activities" (p.307).

63 "Introduction", *The Bodley Head Saki*, p.60.

64 The "Mappin stamp" is almost certainly a punning reference to a jeweller's hallmark such as may be found on silverware. The word, "hallmark" has an ironic significance in "The Seven Cream Jugs" also: "his hosts [...] wore an uneasy manner that might have been the hallmark of conscious depravity" (p.501).

65 Drake, "The Sauce for the Asparagus", p.63. It is noteworthy too that in "The Mapped Life", the niece considers it a justification for hanging a cook that "'she sent up the wrong kind of sauce with the asparagus'" (p.481).

66 In "A Bread and Butter Miss" it is the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which is recommended for that purpose (p.435).

67 Who appears in *The Unbearable Bassington*, too, as "'one of the Cheshire Spelvexits'" (p.611) while a Mrs Spelvexit is part of the Duchess's set in "Reginald at the Carlton", p.24.

68 Similar to this is "The Sex that Doesn't Shop" where the empty frivolity of female lives is amply illustrated.

69 The name "Cushat-Prinkley", meaning a preening woodpigeon, conjures up the image of a self-important popinjay.

70 "Introduction", p.41.

71 Like Groby Lington's monkey in "The Remoulding of Groby Lington", p.226 and the pig in "The Boar-Pig", p.247.

72 Reminiscent of Francesca Bassington in her drawing room in *The Unbearable Bassington* (pp.570-71).

73 The sparrow is a symbol of female sexuality in Catullus and in 16th century English poetry.

74 J. Lewis May, *John Lane and the Nineties* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1936), p.193, quotes "Sir John Squire in an article contributed to *Land and Water*, in February, 1919".

- 75 Bishop Reginald Heber: What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;
Though every prospect pleases
And only man is vile...
- 76 "We don't feel we need a change of thrush at our time of
life" (p.128).
- 77 "It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all."
Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King*, "Merlin and Vivien", l.388.
Tennyson: A Selected Edition. Edited by Christopher Ricks,
(London: Longman, 1989), p.818.
- 78 In "The Schartz-Metterklume Method": "You may be very clever
and modern, Miss Hope" (p.287).
- 79 The fashion in dogs has obviously changed again since the
days of "Reginald in Russia" when the Princess asks Reginald,
"In England is it more chic to have a bull-dog than a fox-
terrier?" (p.43), or in "Reginald on Tariffs" where Mrs Van
Challaby wants "a Yorkshire terrier of the size and shade that's
being worn now" (p.32).
- 80 This boredom with the wonders of nature is shared the Rev.
Wilfrid Gaspilton in "For the Duration of the War" (pp.533-34).
- 81 The same adjective is used of him in "A Matter of Sentiment"
(p.205).
- 82 Compare this with "She may not be brilliant or particularly
modern" in "The Woman Who Never Should", *Westminster Gazette*,
July 22, 1902, p.2.
- 83 According to Bernard E. Dold, *Edwardian Fall-Out: The Ironic
School* (Messina: Peloritana Editrice, 1972), p.16, "The Lost
Sanjak" "probably was inspired by a sensational case of the
period when a pretender to a fortune failed to prove his
knowledge of certain school subjects".
- 84 Mentioned also in "The Cupboard of the Yesterdays": "The
Sanjak of Novi Bazar" (p.531).
- 85 Canon Clore in "The East Wing" takes a different stance: "I
am in favour of women having the vote myself, even if, as some
theologians assert, they have no souls" (M.p.40).
- 86 Like one of the "merely musical" in "The Chaplet" (p.144).
- 87 The role of animals in Saki's own life has a significant
bearing on the frequency with which they appear throughout the
stories, particularly the incident which led to his own mother's
death. Having survived three pregnancies in Burma, she was sent

home for the sake of her well-being to have her fourth child in England, but died after being charged by a cow in a Devon country lane. The intolerable irony of this appears to have influenced Saki's view of the animal kingdom, and the retributive role of the animal throughout his writings may be interpreted as a kind of exorcism of this tragic accident.

88 "The Bag" (like "The Mouse") has a punning significance, in this case referring also to the Major whom Mrs Hoopington is hoping to 'bag' in marriage; and possibly Norah's hopes of the "mixed bag", Vladimir too.

89 In this he resembles the Stossens in "The Boar-Pig" who cry, "Shoo! Hish! Hish! Shoo!" (p.247).

90 This appeared in *Bystander Annual*, 1913, (published November 17), pp.35-36, under the title: "The Elk: A Christmastide Tragedy!".

91 Possibly some relation of Jane Thropplestance in "Louise"?

92 She has this in common with Mrs Toop in "Gabriel-Ernest" who had "eleven other children" (p.69).

93 According to Brewer, in Scandinavian folklore Berserk always fought ferociously and without armour. Presumably Berserker is even more formidable.

94 An excuse devised also by the "emergency brain" of Elinor in "The Occasional Garden" (p.508).

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

If "The Mapped Life" is taken as a statement of Saki's position, the chapter on "Elaborate Futilities" portrays a microcosm of the society which he abhors. In this parade of "naked truths and overdressed fictions" ("Reginald on Besetting Sins", p.27) he exposes the absurd behaviour, futile pursuits and distorted values of the misguided characters whom he is satirising. It is no accident that this illuminating dialogue between a niece and a prosaically-minded aunt should be inspired by a Zoo, the call of the wild imperfectly muted by the curbs of civilisation.

If the niece laments her own and her family's "lack of initiative" (p.480) she would certainly applaud the action of Lucien Wattleskeat in "The East Wing". By these standards it is perfectly reasonable that he should consider his highly-valued life as worth forfeiting for the one imaginative gesture of his hostess's stifled existence. Her painting of a portrait of the daughter she has longed for, and who exists only in her imagination, proves that she herself is capable of salvation, even though the despair of her anguished plaint: "'it will all begin over again now, the old life, the old unsatisfying weariness, the old monotony'" (M.p.45) suggests that she has given up hope. Her one bid for freedom is of little avail against the stultifying regime which daily engulfs her, and from which the tragedy of the fire is merely a temporary respite.

The further irony of the fire's being accidental bears out the niece's assertion in "The Mapped Life" that "'if a wasp happens to sting one of us, well, that is the wasp's initiative, not ours; all we do is wait for the swelling to go down'" (pp.480-81). Throughout these stories the constant refrain is a plea for the individual to break free from the bonds which

constrain him. When the aunt asks, "'What on earth do you mean by trammels? We are merely trammelled by the ordinary decent conventions of civilized society'" (p.480), she expresses the unenlightened view of the typical victim whom Saki is attempting, with all the ingenuity at his disposal, to jolt out of complacency, accidie and hidebound convention.

The human adult with his frailties and imperfections has four antagonists throughout the stories: the child, the supernatural, the "imp of Inconsequence"(1) and the animal world, which conspire severally and together to disconcert at best and punish at worst, sometimes with death. Again and again arrogance and wilful blindness are routed by insight and imagination.

In the first chapter, the "inexorable logic" of the child cuts through the hypocrisy and evasions of the adults who are no match for their tenacity and shrewdness, the inferiority of the adults all the more telling because of the surprising nature of its disclosure. This same effect is equally true of the role of the supernatural in "The Domain of Miracle". In "Reginald's Drama" Reginald declares, "After all, life teems with things that have no earthly reason" (p.30) the ironic truth of which is demonstrated again and again. In both these chapters, the unexpected quality is designed to shock the gullible into a proper awareness of what is hidden below the surface.

Typical of Saki is the universal use of lies, as illustrated in "The Realms of Fiction", to uncover hidden truths - the ultimate in inversion. As for the practical jokes, in "The Hen" Clovis asks the stolid Jane Martlett, "'Have you ever considered what it must be like to go on unceasingly doing the correct thing in the correct manner in the same surroundings for the greater part of a lifetime?'" (p.256). Her predictable reply is the perfect justification for the tricks devised to upset the self-satisfied and stampede the foolish into a rejection of the conventions

which they have always accepted unquestioningly.

All manner of allusions are employed to arrest the attention and certain key words seem to act almost as a code in this constant invitation to re-examine appearances. Frequent reference is made to "eyes" in the sense both of perception and opinion, and Appendix A explores several other words whose incidence seems meaningful in this bid to uncover latent truths. Behaviour is artificial and often pompous, feelings are masked and often inappropriate, laughter is generally forced or mirthless and everywhere the only evidence of natural behaviour is in the animal kingdom or the world of the child whose innocence is of a very knowing kind.

It is not important that many of the stories could readily fit into any one of these chapters. What is significant is that by adopting any one of these "voices" it is possible to question the seeming import of what Saki is saying, and discover some nuance or detect a subtle undertow of meaning. A Saki short story in some respects resembles an iceberg: superficially sparkling, sharp and refractive, but with most of the content - the dangerous part, perhaps - lurking below the surface with its "elusive undercurrents".

Notes

1 Vivian Carter's description of Reginald in *Bystander* (October 18, 1911), 134.

Abbreviations used in Appendix A and in the Index

The following is a list of abbreviations of the short stories, novels, plays and sketches referred to in this dissertation.

A	Adrian
AC	The Achievement of the Cat
Al	The Almanack
B	The Background
Bag	The Bag
BBM	A Bread and Butter Miss
BCE	Bertie's Christmas Eve
BD	The Baker's Dozen
BFTW	The Blood-Feud of Toad-Water
Bi	Birds on the Western Front
BO	The Byzantine Omelette
BP	The Boar-Pig
Br	The Brogue
BS	The Blind Spot
Bu	The Bull
C	Canossa
CAR	Clovis on the Alleged Romance of Business
CC	Cross Currents
Ch	The Chaplet
CMK	Comments of Mounq Ka
Co	The Cobweb
CPR	Clovis on Parental Responsibilities
CT	Cousin Teresa
CY	The Cupboard of the Yesterdays
D	The Dreamer
DCU	The Disappearance of Crispina UMBERLEIGH
DCWI	The Dalmeny Cat that Walked by Itself (political sketch)
DD	A Defensive Diamond
DP	"Down Pens"
DT	The Death-Trap (play)
Du	Dusk
E	The Elk
EE	The Easter Egg
EMP	Excepting Mrs Pentherby
Es	Esmé
EW	The East Wing
F	Fate
FB	The Forbidden Buzzards
FD	For the Duration of the War
FN	The Feast of Nemesis

Fo	Forewarned
FS	Filboid Studge, The Story of a Mouse That Helped
Fur	Fur
G	The Guests
GE	Gabriel-Ernest
GP	The Gala Programme
H	The Hedgehog
Hen	The Hen
HF	The Hounds of Fate
HI	Hermann the Irascible - A Story of the Great Weep
HP	A Housing Problem
HT	A Holiday Task
HW	The Holy War
Hy	Hyacinth
I	The Interlopers
ILS	The Image of the Lost Soul
IP	The Infernal Parliament
IR	The Innocence of Reginald
JAS	The Jestings of Arlington Stringham
JP	Judkin of the Parcels
KW	Karl-Ludwig's Window (play)
L	Laura
Lo	Louis
Lou	Louise
LR	The Lumber-Room
LS	The Lost Sanjak
Lu	The Lull
M	Mark
MG	"Ministers of Grace"
MH	The Music on the Hill
ML	The Mapped Life
MM	The Match-Maker
Mor	Morlvera
Mou	The Mouse
MPT	Mrs Packletide's Tiger
MS	A Matter of Sentiment
ND	The Name-Day
NSS	The Not So Stories (political sketches)
O	The Oversight
OA	On Approval
OG	The Occasional Garden
OTP	The Old Town of Pskoff
OW	The Open Window

P	The Penance
PBK	The Purple of the Balkan Kings
PHC	The Philanthropist and the Happy Cat
PL	The Phantom Luncheon
PMB	The Peace of Mowsle Barton
PO	The Peace Offering
Pon	The Pond
Q	The Quest
QS	Quail Seed
QT	The Quince Tree
R	Reginald
RA	Reginald on the Academy
RBS	Reginald on Besetting Sins
RC	Reginald at the Carlton
RCP	Reginald on Christmas Presents
RCR	Reginald's Christmas Revel
RCT	Reginald's Choir Treat
RD	Reginald's Drama
Re	The Recessional
RGL	The Remoulding of Groby Lington
RHP	Reginald on House-Parties
RLA	The Reticence of lady Anne
Ro	The Romancers
RPP	Reginald's Peace Poem
RR	Reginald's Rubaiyat
RRE	The Rise of the Russian Empire (history)
RRu	Reginald in Russia
RT	Reginald at the Theatre
RTa	Reginald on Tariffs
RW	Reginald on Worries
S	The Strategist
SCJ	The Seven Cream Jugs
SD	A Shot in the Dark
SE	The Square Egg
SG	The Saint and the Goblin
Sh	The Sheep
SL	The Soul of Laploshka
SLB	The Stampeding of Lady Bastable
SMM	The Schartz-Metterklume Method
SN	A Sacrifice to Necessity
SO	The Stalled Ox
SP	The Seventh Pullet
SS	The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope
ST	Shock Tactics
Sta	The Stake
StT	The Story-Teller
StV	The Story of St. Vespaluus
STDS	The Sex That Doesn't Shop
SV	Sredni Vashtar
SW	The She-Wolf
T	Tea

Th	The Threat
To	Tobermory
TOT	The Talking-Out of Tarrington
TP	The Toys of Peace
TR	A Touch of Realism
TS	The Treasure-Ship
UB	The Unbearable Bassington
UnB	The Unkindest Blow
UnC	The Unrest-Cure
W	Wratislav
WA	The Westminster Alice (political sketches)
WC	The Wolves of Cernogratz
WD	The Way to the Dairy
WP	The Watched Pot (play)
WWC	When William Came (novel)
WWNS	The Woman Who Never Should (sketch)
YM	The Yarkand Manner
YT	A Young Turkish Catastrophe

APPENDIX A

Table of Frequency of Key Words

The following is a list of words which occur either throughout the stories or in concentration in a few stories, and seem to act as signposts to direct the reader's attention to specific characteristics or underlying truths. The number of incidences of a specific word is shown in brackets after an abbreviated reference to the short story in which it occurs, in order of decreasing frequency.

1. Words which draw attention to a preoccupation with appearances or highlight foibles:

Absurd(ly)	11	
Air (meaning manner)	61	QS(3)
Ambition/ambitious	15	
Anxious/iety	61	Fur(5)
Approve(d)/approval	22	
Assure(d)/assurance	30	HW(3)
Awkward(ness)	20	SCJ(5)
Bribery	7	
Civilize(ed)/civilization	18	AC(4)
Complacent(ly)	16	
Convention(s)/conventional	11	DP(4);ML(3)
Curious/curiosity	23	
Diplomacy/diplomat(ic)	12	
Disapprove/al	22	MS(12)
Drama(s)/dramatic(ally)	38	
Elaborate(ly)	19	Mor(3)
Embarrassing/embarrassment	28	To(4)
Excited(ly)/excitement	59	CT(4);F(3);QS(3)
Fruitless	11	
Futile/futility(ies)	7	
Important/importance	67	CPR(4);M(4);Bu(3);LR(3); MP(3);T(3)
Initiate(d)/initiative/atory	16	ML(4)
Luxury/ies	15	
Nerve(s)/nervous	51	BWF(3)OW(3);SCJ(3);

Odious	8	
Outrage(ous)	9	
Panic	11	
Patronizing/patronage	11	
Perfunctory	15	DP(3)
Placid(ly)	15	
Polite(ly)	22	
Respectable	29	CC(10);QT(4)
Ridiculous	9	
Scandal(ize)/scandalous	36	RC(3);SS(3)
Sensation(al)	30	
Shock(s)/shocking	15	
Special(ly)/specialist	46	
Specialize(/)specialization	12	LS(4)
Spectacle/spectacular	11	
Stampede	10	
Tragic/tragedies	65	OW(5);Pon(5);BS(4)
Unexpected(ly)	20	IR(3)
Vague(ly)	20	

2. Words which draw attention to hidden possibilities or are ambiguous in their use:

Alleged	14	
Allude(d)/allusion	22	
Apparent(ly)	24	
Appear(ed)/appearance	95	
Blank	21	P(8)
Confide(d)/confidential(ly)	20	
Conscious	28	
Delusion	6	
Distinct(ly)	40	
Dream(er)/dreaming	53	BBM(19);D(4);SS(4)
Emergency	19	
Evidence/evident(ly)	57	
Fancy/fancied	56	
Genuine(ly)	24	
Hint(ed)	21	
Illusion/illusory	7	ML(4)

Imagine/ation	105	TR(6);ML(4);SV(4)
Impossible/impossibility(ies)	18	
Inspiration	25	BBM(4)
Invent(ion)	32	TS(6);SP(3)
Obvious(ly)	57	
Outward	15	
Possible(bly)/possibility(ies)	125	PMB(5);GE(5);Fo(4);LR(4); To(4)
Pretend/pretence(s)	27	
Private(ly)	44	ST(4)
Probable/probably	96	
Real(ly)/realism/reality(ies)	219	ML(9);RD(5);RGL(5); T(5);RRu(5);RW(5); Bu(4);DP(4);L(4); Mou(4);RHP(4);SW(4)
Reasonable/ably)	20	ML(3)
Remarkable	27	
Ridiculous	9	
Romance(r)/romantic	17	CAR(6)
Seem(ed)/seeming(ly)	272	WC(5);P(8);BBM(5);QS(6); Sh(4);CY(4);BWF(5);Pon(4); LS(4);MH(8);PMB(11);HF(8); MG(6);SP(4);SO(6);StT(5); SL(5);Mou(5)
Sign	29	
Spurious	7	
Suggest(ed)/suggestion	107	RR(4);To(5)
Suppose(d)(ing)/supposition	145	LS(4);S(4);L(5);QT(4)
Suspect(ed)	11	
Symptom	8	
Unobtrusive	20	
Wonderful(ly)	23	

3. Words with mysterious or supernatural overtones:

Angel(s)/angelic	43	MG(22)
Apparition	6	
Beast	61	GE(4);Es(4);MPT(6);Q(3); MH(5);SW(6);L(4);DD(3); P(4)
Earth(ly)	57	MG(4);IP(4)
Fate(s)/fateful	36	BD(3);HF(4);E(5);F(3)
Furtive(ly)	25	

Heaven(s)/heavenly	26	
Hidden	15	SV(3);P(3)
Human	105	AC(6);Co(5);Fo(4);IP(4); MG(4):TO(4)
Lurk(ing)	9	
Magic	11	SW(5)
Miracle	11	
Secret(ly)/secrecy	19	
Sinister	11	
Uncanny/uncanniness	8	GE(3)
Unseen	8	SW(3)
Wild(ly)/wildness	75	GE(10);Q(4);MH(7);GP(7)
Wilderness	7	CC(4)
Wolf/wolves	65	SW(19);StT(7);ND(5);LR(4); WC(8)

APPENDIX B

"Saki"

The East Wing

A Tragedy in the Manner of the Discursive Dramatists

It was early February and the hour was somewhere about two in the morning. Most of the house-party had retired to bed. Lucien Wattleskeat had merely retired to his bedroom where he sat over the still vigorous old-age of a fire, balancing the entries in his bridge-book. They worked out at seventy-eight shillings on the right side, as the result of two evenings' play, which was not so bad, considering that the stakes had been regrettably low.

Lucien was a young man who regarded himself with an undemonstrative esteem, which the undiscerning were apt to mistake for indifference. Several women of his acquaintance were on the look-out for nice girls for him to marry, a vigil in which he took no share.

The atmosphere of the room was subtly tinged with an essence of tuberose, and more strongly impregnated with the odour of wood-fire smoke. Lucien noticed this latter circumstance as he finished his bridge-audit, and also noticed that the fire in the grate was not a wood one, neither was it smoking.

A stronger smell of smoke blew into the room a moment later as the door opened, and Major Boventry, pyjama-clad and solemnly excited, stood in the doorway.

"The house is on fire!" he exclaimed.

"Oh," said Lucien, "is that it? I thought perhaps you had come to talk to me. If you would shut the door the smoke wouldn't pour in so."

"We ought to do something," said the Major with conviction.

"I hardly know the family," said Lucien, "but I suppose one will be expected to be present, even though the fire does not

appear to be in this wing of the house."

"It may spread to here," said the Major.

"Well, let's go and look at it," assented Lucien, "though it's against my principles to meet trouble half-way."

"Grasp your nettle, that's what I say," observed Bovertry.

"In this case, Major, it's not our nettle," retorted Lucien, carefully shutting the bedroom door behind him.

In the passage they encountered Canon Clore, arrayed in a dressing-gown of Albanian embroidery, which might have escaped remark in a *Te Deum* service in the Cathedral of the Assumption at Moscow, but which looked out of place in the corridor of an English country house. But then, as Lucien observed to himself, at a fire one can wear anything.

"The house is on fire," said the Canon, with the air of one who lends dignity to a fact by according it gracious recognition.

"It's in the east wing, I think," said the Major.

"I suppose it is another case of suffragette militancy," said the Canon. "I am in favour of women having the vote myself, even if, as some theologians assert, they have no souls. That, indeed, would furnish an additional argument for including them in the electorate, so that all sections of the community, the soulless and the souled, might be represented, and, being in favour of the female vote, I am naturally in favour of militant means to achieve it. Belonging as I do to a Church Militant, I should be inconsistent if I professed to stand aghast at militant methods in vote-winning warfare. But, at the same time, I cannot resist pointing out that the women who are using violent means to wring the vote-right from a reluctant legislature are destroying the value of the very thing for which they are struggling. A vote is of no conceivable consequence to anybody unless it carries with it the implicit understanding that majority-rule is the settled order of the day, and the militants are actively engaged in demonstrating that any minority armed with a box of matches and a total disregard of consequences can force its opinions and its wishes on an

indifferent or hostile community. It is not merely manor-houses that they are destroying, but the whole fabric of government by ballot-box."

"Oughtn't we to be doing something about the fire?" said Major Boventry.

"I was going to suggest something of the sort myself," said the Canon stiffly.

"Tomorrow may be too late, as the advertisements in the newspapers say," observed Lucien.

In the hall they met their hostess, Mrs Gramplain.

"I'm so glad you have come," she said; "servants are so little help in an emergency of this kind. My husband has gone off in the car to summon the fire-brigade."

"Haven't you telephoned to them?" asked the Major.

"The telephone unfortunately is in the east wing," said the hostess; "so is the telephone-book. Both are being devoured by the flames at this moment. It makes one feel dreadfully isolated. Now if the fire had only broken out in the west wing instead, we could have used the telephone and had the fire-engines here by now."

"On the other hand," objected Lucien, "Canon Clore and Major Boventry and myself would probably have met with the fate that has overtaken the telephone-book. I think I prefer the present arrangement."

"The butler and most of the other servants are in the dining-room, trying to save the Raeburns and the alleged Van Dyke," continued Mrs Gramplain, "and in that little room on the first landing, cut off from us by the cruel flames, is my poor darling Eva - Eva of the golden hair. Will none of you save her?"

"Who is Eva of the golden hair?" asked Lucien.

"My daughter," said Mrs Gramplain.

"I didn't know you had a daughter," said Lucien, "and really I don't think I can risk my life to save some one I've never met or even heard about. You see, my life is not only wonderful and beautiful to myself, but if my life goes, nothing else really matters - to me. I don't suppose you can realise that, to me,

the whole world as it exists to-day, the Ulster problem, the Albanian tangle, the Kikuyu controversy, the wide field of social reform and Antarctic exploration, the realms of finance, and research and international armaments, all this varied and crowded and complex world, all comes to a complete and absolute end the moment my life is finished. Eva might be snatched from the flames and live to be the grandmother of brilliant and charming men and women; but, as far as I should be concerned, she and they would no more exist than a vanished puff of cigarette smoke or a dissolved soda-water bubble. And if, in losing my life, I am to lose her life and theirs, as far as I personally am concerned with them, why on earth should I, personally, risk my life to save hers and theirs?"

"Major Boventry," exclaimed Mrs Gramplain, "you are not clever, but you are a man with honest human feelings. I have only known you for a few hours, but I am sure you are the man I take you for. You will not let my Eva perish."

"Lady," said the Major stumblingly, "I would gladly give my life to rescue your Eva, or anybody's Eva for the matter of that, but my life is not mine to give. I am engaged to the sweetest little woman in the world. I am everything to her. What would my poor little Mildred say if they brought her news that I had cast away my life in an endeavour, perhaps fruitless, to save some unknown girl in a burning country house?"

"You are like all the rest of them," said Mrs Gramplain bitterly; "I thought that you, at least, were stupid. It shows how rash it is to judge a man by his bridge-play. It has been like this all my life," she continued in dull, level tones; "I was married, when little more than a child, to my husband, and there has never been any real bond of affection between us. We have been polite and considerate to one another, nothing more. I sometimes think that if we had had a child things might have been different."

"But - your daughter Eva?" queried the Canon, and the two other men echoed his question.

"I have never had a daughter," said the woman quietly, yet,

amid the roar and crackle of the flames, her voice carried, so that not a syllable was lost. "Eva is the outcome of my imagination. I so much wanted a little girl, and at last I came to believe that she really existed. She grew up, year by year, in my mind, and when she was eighteen I painted her portrait, a beautiful young girl with masses of golden hair. Since that moment the portrait has been Eva. I have altered it a little with the changing years - she is twenty-one now - and I have repainted her dress with every incoming fashion. On her last birthday I painted her a pair of beautiful diamond earrings. Every day I have sat with her for an hour or so, telling her my thoughts, or reading to her. And now she is there, alone with the flames and the smoke, unable to stir, waiting for the deliverance that does not come."

"It is beautiful," said Lucien; "it is the most beautiful thing I ever heard."

"Where are you going?" asked his hostess, as the young man moved towards the blazing staircase of the east wing.

"I am going to try and save her," he answered; "as she has never existed, my death cannot compromise her future existence. I shall go into nothingness, and she, as far as I am concerned, will go into nothingness too; but then she has never been anything else."

"But your life, your beautiful life?"

"Death in this case is more beautiful."

The Major started forward.

"I am going too," he said simply.

"To save Eva?" cried the woman.

"Yes," he said; "my little Mildred will not grudge me to a woman who has never existed."

"How well he reads our sex," murmured Mrs Gramplain, "and yet how badly he plays bridge!"

The two men went side by side up the blazing staircase, the slender young figure in the well-fitting dinner-jacket and the thick-set military man in striped pyjamas of an obvious Swan & Edgar pattern. Down in the hall below them stood the woman in

her pale wrapper, and the Canon in his wonderful-hued Albanian-work dressing-gown, looking like the arch-priests of some strange religion presiding at a human sacrifice.

As the rescue-party disappeared into the roaring cavern of smoke and flames, the butler came into the hall, bearing with him one of the Raeburns.

"I think I hear the clanging of the fire-engines, ma'am," he announced.

Mrs Gramplain continued staring at the spot where the two men had disappeared.

"How stupid of me!" she said presently to the Canon. "I've just remembered I sent Eva to Exeter to be cleaned. Those two men have lost their lives for nothing."

"They have certainly lost their lives," said the Canon.

"The irony of it all," said Mrs Gramplain, "the tragic irony of it all!"

"The real irony of the affair lies in the fact that it will be instrumental in working a social revolution of the utmost magnitude," said the Canon. "When it becomes known, through the length and breadth of the land, that an army officer and a young ornament of the social world have lost their lives in a country-house fire, started by suffragette incendiarism, the conscience of the country will be aroused, and people will cry out that the price is too heavy to pay. The militants will be in worse odour than ever, but, like the Importunate Widow, they will get their way. Over the charred bodies of Major Boventry and Lucien Wattleskeat the banners of progress and enfranchisement will be carried forward to victory, and the mothers of the nation will henceforth take their part in electing the Mother of Parliaments. England will range herself with Finland and other enlightened countries which have already admitted women to the labours, honours, and responsibilities of the polling-booth. In the early hours of this February morning a candle has been lighted - "

"The fire was caused by an over-heated flue, and not by suffragettes, sir," interposed the butler.

At that moment a scurry of hoofs and a clanging of bells, together with the hoot of a motor-horn, were heard above the roaring of the flames.

"The fire-brigade!" exclaimed the Canon.

"The fire-brigade and my husband," said Mrs Gramplain, in her dull level voice; "it will all begin over again now, the old life, the old unsatisfying weariness, the old monotony; nothing will be changed."

"Except the east wing," said the Canon gently.

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INDEX OF CHARACTERS AND STORIES

This index consists of a single alphabetical sequence, of Saki's characters and stories as they are discussed in this dissertation.

Characters are listed in italics by surname or, in the absence of surname, by forename. Abbreviated page references, enclosed within braces ({ and }), are given to the published editions of the stories. References in each case are to the first mention of the name in each story. For an expansion of abbreviations used see the list which precedes this Index (p.231); for an explanation of the page references see the "Note on Text" which precedes the Introduction (p.v).

References not enclosed in braces are to page numbers in this dissertation; those in bold indicate extended analysis or discussion.

- Abbleway, John James* {ND 366} **126-27**
Adelaide, Great-Aunt {BS 293} 196
Adrian {A 140} **132-33**
Adrian 117n.48, **132-33**
Agatha, Aunt {RCP 9} 58n.19
Albert-Victor {BD 94} 186
Alberti, Col. {UnC 129} 148
Ali The Blest {YTC 61} 213
Alice see Westminster Alice, The
Almanack, The 163n.23, 164n.35, 167n.70, 222n.33
Amabel {RCT 17} **131**, 164n.27
Amalie see *Schmidt, Fraulein Amalie*
Amanda {L 241} **104-05**, 118n.57
Amblecope {DD 354} **121-22**, 123, 162n.11
Anne, Lady {RLA 46} **176**
Appin, Cornelius {To 108} **98, 100**
Attab (cat) {PHC 381} **204-06**
Attray, Ronnie {Sta 333} 180

Babwolds, The {RCR 32} 132
 Background, The **192**
 Bag, The **215**, 227n.88
 Baker's Dozen, The **185-87**, 202, 219
Barfield, Major {To 111} 99
Baroness {Es 101;StV 166;WD 173;PO 179;OG 506} **128-30, 156-57**,
 163n.22, 168n.85, 191
Bassington, Comus {UB 572} 116n.42, 220n.1
Bassington, Francesca {UB 569} 114n.20, 116n.42, 169, 225n.72
Bastable, Lady {SLB 119} **136-37**
Bavvel, Hortensia {WP 868} 165n.46, 224n.49
Beauwhistle, Lady {RW 20} 176
Belturbet {MG 215} 108
Berserker (horse) {Br 250} 218, 227n.93
Bert {Mor 492} 6, 56
Bertha[1] {StT 351} 8, 55
Bertha[2] {Mor 493} 6, 55
Bertie see *Tahn, Bertie van*
 Bertie's Christmas Eve 164n.29, 221n.21
Bessbury, Gregory {PHC 382} **204-06**
Bessbury, Jocantha {PHC 381} **204-06**
Bilsiter, Leonard {SW 235} **139-42**
Bimberton, Loona {MPT 115;Re 200} **151-52**, 156, 167n.78
Birberry, Sir Leon {UnC 131} 148
Bittholz, Dora {Hen 254} 137
Blaik, Agnes {S 82;FN 321} 199
Bleek, Ada {H 476} **101**, 107-08, 110
Blemley, Lady Adelaide {To 108} 99
Blemley, Sir Wilfrid {To 109} 99, 109
Blenkinthroe {SP 287} **127-28**
 Blind Spot, The **196**
Blonze, Lady {TR 301} **143**
 Blood-Feud of Toad-Water, The 165n.46
Bludward, Mrs {Fo 442} **206-07**
Bludward, Robert {Fo 442} **207-08**

Boar-Pig, The 4, **133-34**, 165n.40, 166n.58, 175, 215, 225n.71,
 227n.89
 Bobby {LR 373} 27, 35
 Boobelstein, Baroness {RD 29} 173
 Bope, Eleanor {TP 393} 7
 Bope, Harvey {TP 393} 7, 53-54
 Boveal, Blanche {TR 301} 143
 Boventry, Major {EW M.39} **184-85**
 Bread and Butter Miss, A 146, **182**, 225n.66
 Brimley Bomefields {WD 173} **179-80**
 Broddle, Constance {Es 101} **128-29**, 130, 168n.90
 The Brogue (horse) {Br 250} **218-19**
 Brogue, The 180, 210, 215, **218-19**
 Brope, Septimus {SS 267} **193-95**
 Bruttie, Reggie {EMP 465} **138-39**, 222n.31
 Bull, The 215-**16**
 Byzantine Omelette, The 143, 166n.65, **189-91**

 Camelford, Agatha {RD 29} **173**
 Canossa 188
 Carewe, Mrs Emily {BD 90} **185-87**, 219
 Carlotta, Lady {SMM 283} **134-35**, 167n.82
 Carrywood, Lord {Lou 398} 202
 Cernogratz, von {WC 410} **75, 77, 79**, 114-115n.22
 Challaby, Mrs Van {RTa 32} 226n.79
 Chaplet, The **188-89**, 226n.86
 Chattel-Monkheim, Sophie {BO 315} 143, 166n.65, **189-91**
 Cheele, Van {GE 63} 66, 87, **90-94**, 99, 106, 111, 115n.33,
 116n.47, 117n.53, 127, 146, 166n.53, 188
 Cheele, Miss Van (aunt) {GE 64} **91-94**, 166n.67
 Chemping, Adela {D 322} **157-60**
 Chermabacon, Bobbie {HP L.299} **183-84**
 Chobham, Sir John {Fo 444} 208
 Claux, Mrs de {BBM 432} **182**
 Clore, Canon {EW M.40} **184**, 226n.85

Clover Fairy (bull) {Bu 487} **216**
Clovis see *Sangrail, Clovis*
Clovis on Parental Responsibilities **120**
Cobweb, The 66, **79-82**, 87, 97, 100, 109, 113n.5, 115n.30
Conrad {WC 410} **76-78**, 108, 114-15n.22
Conradin {SV 139} 10, 24, 27, 35, **39-52**, 55-56, **67-68**, 114n.14
Cornett, Mrs {To 112} 98, 100
Coulterneb, Betty {FB 330} 150
Cousin Teresa **187-88**, 195, 200, 216, 220n.1, **225n.62**
Crale, Martha {Co 266} **79-82**, 109, 115n.30
Cricks, The {BFTW 56} 165n. **46**
Croot, Betsy {PMB 185} **88-89**, 108
Crosby, Morton {Ro 279} **124**
Cross Currents 163n.15, 193
Croyden, Lucas {A 141} **132-33**
Cullumpton, Lady {M 473;H 476} 101, 116n.46, 123, 162n.9
Cullumpton, Sir Gervase {H 476} 101
Cumble, Mrs Bebberley {QT 326} **148-50**
Cunningham {GE 63} **91-93**
Cupboard of the Yesterdays, The 226n.84
Cushat-Prinkly, James {T 402} **202-04**, 225n.69
Cuthbert {QT 328} 150
Cuvering, Matilda {BP 246} 4, **133-34**, 166n.58
Cuvering, Mrs {BP 246;F 484} 164n.34
Cyprian {D 322} **158-60**

Dagberry, Major {EMP 466} 138
Dalmeny Cat that Walked by Itself, The (sketch) 3n.1
Death-Trap, The (play) 223n.38
Debchance, Alethia {Fo 441} 203, **206-08**
Deplis, Henri {B 121} **192**
Defensive Diamond, A **120-22**, 123, 162n.11, 163n.12
De Claux see *Claux, Mrs de*
De Ropp see *Ropp, Mrs De*
Dillot, Rex {F 483} 117n.54, 135

Disappearance of Crispina Umberleigh, The **197**
Dobrinton, Mr {CC 87} 193
Dole, Mrs {He 474} **100-01**
 'Down Pens' **198-99**
Drake, Colonel {MS 204} 181
Drakmanton, Lady Betty {PL 427} **155-56**
Drakmanton, Sir James {PL 427} 155
Dreamer, The **157-60**
Dubarri, Lena {Th 463} 214
Duchess see *Irene (Duchess)*
Duff-Chubleigh, Mrs Elizabeth {HP L.299} **183-84**
Duff-Chubleigh, Margaret {HP 300} 183
Dulverton, Lulu Duchess of {TS 263;WP 877} **195-96**, 224n.49
Dumbarton, Major Richard {BD 90} **185-87**
Durmot, Vera {Lu 271;TR 303;Al L.293} 4, 133, 143, **144-47**,
 163n.23, 167n.70, 167n.72
Dushford, Emily {PO 180} **191-92**
 Dusk **124-25**, 139, 163n.20, 166n.57, 195
Dwelf, Caiaphas {M 471} 122-23, 124

East Wing, The (see Appendix B) **184-85**, 198, 226n.85, 228
Easter Egg, The 5
Egbert[1] {RLA 46} 76, 135, **176**
Egbert[2] {L 241;BS 293} 104, 196, 224n.51
Egbert[3] {DP 363} **199**
Eggelby, Eric {CPR 337} 120
Eggelby, Mrs Marion {CPR 337} **120**
Eleanor {Fur 377} **160-61**
Elk, The **94**, **217-18**, 227n.90
Ellam, Rhoda {T 404} **203**
Elsa {W 152} **187**
Emma see *Ladbruk, Emma*
Emmeline {Mor 493} 6, 55-56
Eshley, Theophil {SO 344} 123, **216-17**
Esmé (hyena) {Es 103} **128-29**

Esmé **128-29**, 130, 163n.22, 166n.55, 168n.85,n.90, 187, 202
Eva {EW M.41} **184-85**
Evelyn {FB 332} 151
 Excepting Mrs Pentherby **138-39**, 168n.89, 222n.31

 Fate 117n.54, **135-36**, 164n.34
 Feast of Nemesis, The **199-200**
Finsberry, Odo {To 112; BBM 431} **182**
Florinda (Florrie) {SS 208} **193-95**
 Forbidden Buzzards, The 119, **150-51**
 Forewarned 203, **206-08**
 For the Duration of the War 166n.54, 226n.80
Fritten, Miss {QS 453 } 142
 Fur **160-61**

Gabriel-Ernest {GE 67} **91-94**, 99, 106-07, 110-11, 116n.38
Gabriel-Ernest 66, 70, **90-94**, 110-12, 113n.5, 115n.33, 116n.47,
 121, 166n.67, 227n.92
Gaffin, Jacky {Hy 518} 54
 Gala Programme, The 213-14
Gaspere {BO 316} **190**
Gaspilton, Rev Wilfrid {FD 532} 226n.80
Georg see *Znaeym, Georg*
George (Old) {HF 196} **83-85**, 87
Gilpet, Miss Rose-Marie {Q 148} 201
Gortsby, Norman {Du 297} **124-25**, 163n.20, 166n.57
Gorworth {SP 288} 127, 163n.20
Gradwitz, Ulrich von {I 447} **72-75**, 110-11
Gräfin, The {W 152} **187**
Gramplain, Mrs {EW M.41} **184-85**, 198
Gregory see *Bessbury, Gregory*
Greyes, Miss {QS 453} 142
Gruebel, Baron {WC 411} **75-79**, 100, 104, 109, 114-15n.22,
 118n.57, 163n.17
Gruebel, Baroness {WC 410} **75-79**, 100, 103-04, 114-15n.22,

117n.53, 164n.17
 Guests, The 164n.26
Gurtleberry, Mrs James {ML 479} **198**, 224n.57
Gwent, Ashcombe {SN L.306} 180

 Hampton, Colonel {SW 236} **139-40**
 Hampton, Mrs Mary {SW 236} **139-41**
 Harrowcluff, Basset {CT 306} **187-88**, 200, 216, 225n.62
 Harrowcluff, Lucas {CT 307} **188-89**, 216, 220n.1
 Hatch-Mallard, Mrs {H 475} **100-01**, 111
 Heasant, Mrs {ST 497} **134**
 Heasant, Bertie {ST 495} **134**
 Hedgehog, The **100-01**, 107-08, 111, 113n.5, 121, 163n.9, 165n.42
 Hen, The **137-38**, 229
 Hermann the Irascible {HI 124} **213**
 Hermann the Irascible - A Story of the Great Weep **213**
 Hkrikos (King) {StV 166} **130**
 Holiday Task, A **126**
 Holy War, The **66-68**, 69-70, 98, 107, 113n.5, 117n.55, 154
 Honiton, Vasco {TS 263} **195-96**
 Hoopington, Mrs {Bag 76} 215, 227n.88
 Hoops, Cecilia {SW 236} **139-40**
 Hope, Miss {SMM 284} **134-35**, 226n.78
 Hounds of Fate, The 66, **82-86**, 97, 113n.5, 211
 Housing Problem, A **183**, 222n.33
 Huddle, Miss {UnC 128} **147-48**
 Huddle, J.P. {UnC 127} **147-48**, 209, 222n.29
 Hugo {Fo 442} 207
Hyacinth {Hy 518} 5, 20, 54-56, 165n.43
Hyacinth **4-5**, 9, 20, 52, 55-56, 164n.32, 165n.43

Ilexes, The {RBS 26} 175
Ilpton, Gertrude {JAS 136} 210
 Image of the Lost Soul, The **103-04**, 108, 111, 113n.5, 117n.53
 Infernal Parliament, The 98, 110, 113n.5
 Innocence of Reginald, The 58n.19, 175

Interlopers, The 66, **72-75**, 78-79, 97, 109-111, 113n.5,
 114n.18, 115n.32, 154, 163n.16
Irene (Duchess) {RC 24} **171-72**, 173-74, 194, 210, 221n.10,
 225n.67
Isaacs, Mr Paul {UnC 132} 148
Isobel, Lady {JAS 134} **209-10**

Jack {FB 332} 151
Janetta {DP 363} **199**
Jasper, Sir {Fo 442} **207-08**
Jerton, Kenelm {HT 339} **126**
Jesting of Arlington Stringham, The 165n.42, 194, **208-10**,
 222n.28
Jim, Cousin {Co 269} 81-82
Jocantha see *Bessbury, Jocantha*
Judkin {JP 61} **200-01**, 224n.60
Judkin of the Parcels **200-01**, 224n.60
Jutterly {Hy 518} 5, 55

Karl-Ludwig's Window (play) 223n.38
Kedzon {MG 218} 98
Klammersteins, The {TR 303} 143
Klopstock, Miriam {RBS 26;RTa 32;IR 39} 58n.19, **175**
Kneyght, Bertram {Fur 377} **160-61**
Knopfschrank, Gebhard {OA 385} **192-93**, 217

Ladbruk, Young Mister {Co 270} 81-82
Ladbruk, Mrs Emma {Co 266} **79-82**, 86-87, 97, 109, 115n.32
Langshan-Smith, Miss {RCR 34} **132**
Lanner, Mr {FB 330} 150-51
Laploshka {SL 72} **101-03**, 108, 156, 168n.84
Laura {L 241} 61n.54, **104-05**, 110, 117n.55
Laura 39, **104-05**, 113n.5, 117n.49, 118n.57, 224n.51
Laurence {Bu 487} 216
Ley, Michael {HF 198} **85-86**
Lington, Groby {RGL 224} **105-07**, 108-10, 117n.55, 164n.28,

225n.71

Lockyer, Crefton {PMB 184} 66, 71, **86-90**, 108, 145

Lola see *Pevensey, Lola*

Lost Sanjak, The 128, 139, 165n.48, 210-12, 226n.83

Louis (dog) {Lo 414} **153-54**

Louis **153-55**

Louisa (wolf) {SW 237} **140-41**

Louise **202**, 227n.91

Luddelford, Lena {O 513} **183**

Lull, The **146-47**, 164n.35, 167n.72

Lulu see *Dulverton, Lulu Duchess of*

Lulworth see *Quayne, Sir Lulworth*

Lumber-Room, The 4, 6, 8-11, 19, 24, 25-38, 39, 41, 44, 47, 49-56, 60n.33, 60n.42, 61n.45,n.46,n.47, 66, 76, 115n.31, 131, 161, 165n.36,n.38,n.45, 167n.74, 222n.24

MacGregors, The {SLB 118} **136-37**

Malsom, Catherine {BO 317} **190**

Malsom, Henry {BO 317} **190**

Mapped Life, The **198**, 200-01, 220-01n.8, 224n.53, 225n.65, **228-29**

Marchioness, The {HP L.299} **183-84**

Mark 116n.46, **122-23**, 163n.19, 165n.48, 206

Martlet, Jane {Hen 254} **137-38**, 165-66n.49, 229

Matilda see *Cuvering, Matilda*

Matter of Sentiment, A 167n.71, **180-81**, 226n.81

Max {Ch 145} 189

Mebberley, Mrs Susan {A 141} **132-33**

Mebbin, Louisa {MPT 116} **152-53**, 196

Mellowkent, Augustus (Mark) {M 470} **122-23**, 206, 217

Milly {PL 428} **155-56**

'Ministers of Grace' 98, 107-08, 113n.5, 118n.57, 163n.21

Momeby, Erik {Q 150} 201

Momebys, The {Q 147} **201-02**

Mona see *Waddacombe, Mona*

Morlvera (doll) {Mor 492} 6-7, 56
Morlvera **5-7**, 52-55
Mortimer see *Seltoun, Mortimer*
Motkin {MS 205} 181
Mouse, The 126. 163n.15, **176-78**, 216, 227n.28
Mrs Packletide's Tiger **151-53**, 167n.77, 196, 222n.27
Mudge-Jervises, The {RD 28} 172
Mullen, Betsy {QT 326} **148-50**
Mullet, Mrs {Br 251} **218-19**
Mullet, Jessie {Br 251} **218-19**
Mullet, Toby {Br 250} **218-19**
Music on the Hill, The 66, **68-72**, 78, 83, 109-12, 113n.5,n.8,
114n.16, 115n.32,n.33, 117-18n.55, 145, 166n.56

Name-day, The **126-27**
Nevil {Fo 442} 207
Nicholas {LR 371} 6, 10, **25-38**, 40-41, 44, 47, 49, 51, 52, 54-
56, 60n.33, 115n.31, 131, 167n.74
Nicholas, Sir {TR 302} 143
Niggle, Ellen {PL 430} **156**
Nineveh, Lady {DD 356} 122
Norah {Bag 77} **215**, 227n.88
Norbury, Mrs {H 476} 101
Norbury, Hugo {H 477} 101
Not So Stories, The (sketches) 1
Nuttel, Frampton {OW 259} **144-46**

Occasional Garden, The **156-57**, 227n.94
Octavian see *Ruttle, Octavian*
Odo see *Finsberry, Odo*
Olston, Mrs {FB 330} 150-51
On Approval **192-93**, 217
Open Window, The 113n.5, **144-46**, 164n.35
Orpington, Waldo {Th 463} 214
Oversight, The **182-83**, 221n.16,n.17

Pabham, Lord {Es 105;SW 237} **128-29, 140-41**, 166n.55
Packletide, Mrs {MPT 115;Re 200;MS 205} 151-53, 156, **180-81**,
 222n.27
Paley-Paget, Mrs {BD 92} **186**
Pallaby, Major {Bag 76} **215**, 227n.88
Pallitson, Mrs Celeste {HP L.299 } **183-84**
Pan {MH 162} 64-65, **69-72**, 107, 110-11, 113n.3, 114n.16, 166n.56
Panstreppon, Mrs {Hy 518} 5
Peace Offering, The **191-92**, 221n.13, 223n.47
Peace of Mowsle Barton, The 65-66, 71, **86-90**, 100, 108, 110,
 113n.5, 145
Pellington, Mavis {To 111;SW 238} 99, 139
Penance, The 4, 6, **9-25**, 27-29, 31, 39, 45-46, 48, 51, 53-56,
 57n.4, 58n.14, 60n.34, 61n.55, 62n.58,n.66, 66, 83, 115n.24,
 116n.35, 162n.4, 163n.15, 164n.32, 165n.38, 215
Penricarde, Mr Vincent {Br 251} **218-19**
Pentherby, Mrs {EMP 467} **138-39**
Peterby, Hugo {FB 329} 150
Peterby, Lady {Lo 416} 154
Pevenly, Alicia {SN L.304} **180**
Pevenly, Beryl {SN L.305} **180**
Pevensey, Lola {BBM 432} 146, **182**
Phantom Luncheon, The **155-56**
Philanthropist and the Happy Cat, The **204-06**
Pigeoncote, Peter {SCJ 500} **178-79**, 222n.26
Pigeoncote, Mrs Peter {SCJ 500} **178-79**
Pigeoncote, Wilfrid (The Snatcher) {SCJ 500} **178-79**
Pigeoncote, Wilfrid (The Attache) {SCJ 503} **179**
Pillamon, Martha {PMB 185} **88-89**, 108
Pincini, Signor Andreas {B 122} **192**
Pingsford, Adela {SO 345} **216-17**
Plubley, Waldo {TR 303;FN 321} 106, 117n.53, **143, 188-89**, 199-
 200
Pond, The 66, **94-97**, 101, 111, 113n.5

Pottingdon, Gwenda {OG 506} **156-57**
Prike, Tom {HF 196} **83-86**
Princess, The {TOT 190;BP 246} 133, 164n.31
Prowche, Lady {O 513} **182-83**

Quabarl, Mr {SMM 285} 76, 135
Quabarl, Mrs {SMM 284} **134-35**, 209
 Quail Seed **142-43**, 166n.65
Quayne, Sir Lulworth {L 243;BS 293;YM 310;BBM 432;Th 461} **104-05, 196, 214**, 220, 224n.51
 Quest, The **201-02**
 Quince Tree, The **148-50**, 164n.35, 165n.48
Quinston {MG 216} 98

Rapsley, Elinor {OG 505} **156-57**, 227n.94
 Recessional, The 164n.26, 167n.78, 222n.27
Redford (horse) {JP 61} 200
Reginald {R 5;RCP 8;RA 10;RT 12;RPP 14;RCT 16;RW 18;RHP 20;RC 22;RBS 26;RD 28;RTa 30;RCR 32;RR 35;IR 38;RRu 43} 4, 57n.2, 100, 119, **131-32**, 158, 165n.41, 167n.76, 168n.87,n.88, 169, **170-76**, 187, 194, 198, 200, 210, 216, 219-20, 220n.5,n.7, 226n.79, 230
Reginald 168n.87, **170**
Reginald at the Carlton 166n.59, **171-72**, 194, 225n.67
Reginald at the Theatre **171**
Reginald in Russia 175, 226n.79
Reginald on Besetting Sins **174-75**, 228
Reginald on Christmas Presents 58n.19, 168n.88, 195, 199
Reginald on House-Parties **174**
Reginald on Tariffs 167n.76, 226n.79
Reginald on the Academy **170-71**, 216
Reginald on Worries **173**, 176
Reginald's Choir Treat 116n.48, 117n.52, 131, 165n.41, 173, 200
Reginald's Christmas Revel **131-32**
Reginald's Drama 3n.2, 57n.2, 138, **172-73**, 229
Reginald's Rubaiyat **173-74**

Remoulding of Groby Lington, The **105-07**, 113n.5, 118n.57,
 164n.28, 225n.77

René see *St Gall, René*

Reticence of Lady Anne, The 76, 135, 153, **176**

Rise of the Russian Empire, The (history) 1

Richardson {BO 316} 190

Riversedge, Mrs Henrietta {SS 207} 194

Roger {WD 174} **179-180**

Romancers, The 113n.2, **124**, 166n.52

Ropp, Mrs De {SV 136} 7, 19, 24, 27-28, **40-52**, 53, 55- 56,
 62n.57,n.66, 67-69, 72, 76, 115n.25,n.32, 139, 161

Ruttle, Octavian {P 422} 10, 11, **12-24**, 28, 32, 45-46, 48, 51,
 53, 55, 58n.13, 59n.24, 66, 83, 87, 93, 105, 115n.25, 117n.50,
 146, 162n.4, 167n.79, 216

Ruttle, Olivia {P 424} **16-24**, 54, 167n.79

A Sacrifice to Necessity, A **180**

Sadowa (horse) {MS 206} 181

Saint and the Goblin, The **104**, 109, 113n.5

St Gall, René {WP 882} 224n.59

Sangrail, Mrs {MM 107;SLB 118;Hen 254} 136-37

Sangrail, Clovis {Es 101;MM 106;To 109;MPT 118;SLB 118;B 121;UnC
 127;JAS 135;A 143;Ch 144;Q 148;StV 166;WD 173;PO 179;TOT 190;Re
 199;MS 204;SS 207;SW 237;Br 251;Hen 254;CPR 337;Lou 398;F
 483;ST 496;CAR 559} 4, 100, 105, **119-20**, 122, **128-31**, 132-34,
135-38, **139-42**, **147-48**, 149, **150-51**, 158, 160-61, 163n.22,
 163n.23, 166n.51,n.57, 167n.72,n.75,n.78, 169, 176, 178, **180-**
81, 184, 188, **191-92**, **193-95**, 196, 199-200, **201-02**, 210, 214,
218-19, 220, 220n.5, 221n.13, 229

Sapleton, Mrs {OW 260} 145-46

Saucourt, Aristide {Ch 145} 189

Saunderses, The {BFTW 56} 165n.46

Saxelby, Eleanor {Sta 333} 223n.46

Scarrick, Mr {QS 452} **142-43**

Scarisbrooke, Harry {Fur 379} 160

Scaw, Duke of {MG 214} 98, 107-08
Schartz-Metterklume Method, The 58n.19, 76, **134-35**, 143, 226n.78
Schmidt, Fraulein Amalie {WC 410} **76-79**, 81, 108, 114-15n.22, 163n.17
Sebastable, Joan {Tea 402} **202-03**
Secret Sin of Septimus Brope, The 167n.75, **193-95**, 201
Seltoun, Mortimer {MH 161} 69, **70-72**, 107, 114n.22, 166n.56
Seltoun, Sylvia {MH 161} 69, **70-72**, 75, 86, 107, 109, 111, 115n.33, 127, 139, 145
Seven Cream Jugs, The **178-79**, 225n.64
Seventh Pullet, The 65, 113n.5, **127-28**
Sex that Doesn't Shop, The 157, 163n.12, 203, 225n.68
Sheep, The {Sh 508} 68, 114n.13
Sheep, The 68
She-Wolf, The 65, 113n.5, **139-42**, 202
Shock Tactics **134**, 148
Shot in the Dark, A 125
Sizzle, Lord Hugo {MG 214} 98
Skatterly, Cyril {TR 302} 143-44
Sletherby, Philip {SD L.310} 125
Smith-Paddon {SP 290} 127
Smithly-Dubbs {PL 427} **155-56**
Sophie, Baroness {W 152} **187**
Soul of Laploshka, The **101-03**, 111, 113n.5
Southmolton, Bishop of {DD 356} 121
Spabbink, Leonard {RGL 229} 106, 117n.53
Sparrowby, Stephen {WP 888} 224n.59
Spelvexit, Mrs {RC 24} 225n.67
Spelvexit, Ada {Lou 400;UB 611} 202
Springfield, Latimer {Lu 271} **146-47**
Spurfield, Mrs {PMB 185} **88-89**
Square Egg, The 124, 162n.10
Sredni Vashtar {SV 137} **41-49**, 51, 114n.12
Sredni Vashtar 4, 8-11, 24, 29, 35-37, **39-52**, 53-55, 57n.6,

60n.34, 61n.51, 66, 76, 113n.5, 115n.24, 116n.35, 117n.51, 161, 163n.15

Stake, The 180, 223n.46

Stalled Ox, The 123, 215, **216-17**

Stampeding of Lady Bastable, The **136-37**, 166n.51

Steffink, Bertie {BCE 436} 164n.29

Stoner, Martin {HF 193} 66, **82-86**, 87, 109-11, 117n.55, 211

Story of St Vespaluus, The **129-30**, 168n.85

Story-Teller, The 5, **7-9**, 28, 31, 52-56, 57n.3, 57n.5, 58n.15, 62n.61, 222n.35

Stossen, Mrs Philidore {BP 245} **133-34**, 227n.89

Strategist, The 5, 224n.58

Stringham, Arlington {JAS 133} **209-10**

Stringham, Eleanor {JAS 133} 194, **208-10**

Strubble, Sylvia {OA 386} 193

Strudwarden {Lo 414} **153-55**, 167n.82

Strudwarden, Elsie {Lo 417} **153-54**

Strudwarden, Lena {Lo 414} **153-55**, 167n.82

Sturridge {Hen 256} 137

Superbus, Emperor Placidus {GP 548} 213-14

Susan, Aunt {DP 366} 199

Susan, Lady {MS 133} **180-81**

Suzanne {Fur 377} **160-61**

Sylvia see *Seltoun, Sylvia*

Syria, Duke of {BO 315} 190

Tahn, Bertie van {To 112;Re 119;JAS 135; WD 173;MS 205;TR 302} 143, 158, **180-81**, 210, 223n.45

Talking-Out of Tarrington, The **119-20**, 122, 164n.31

Tarrington {TOT 190} 120

Tea **202-04**

Thackenbury, Mrs {FN 319} 199-200

Thirza see *Yealmton, Thirza*

Thistledale, Lady {PO 183} 191

Thorle, Stephen {UB 662} 162n.5

Threat, The **214**
Thropplestance, Bertie {E 358} **217-18**
Thropplestance, Jane {Lou 398} **202**, 227n.91
Thropplestance, Louise {Lou 398} 202
Thropplestance, Teresa {E 358} **217-18**
Thundleford, Teresa {F 484} 135
Tobermory (cat) {To 109} **98-100**, 109-11, 162n.4, 215
Tobermory **98-100**, 102, 111, 113n.5
Toop child, The {GE 69} 93-94, 146
Toop, Mrs {GE 69} 94, 227n.92
Touch of Realism, A 106, 117n.53, **143-44**, 164n.35, 189
Toys of Peace, The 5-6, 7, 8, 52-56, 58n.16
Treasure-Ship, The **195-96**
Treddleford {DD 354} **120-22**, 123, 163n.12
Troyle, Mrs Jane {SS 207} **193-95**

Umberleigh, Crispina {DCU 406} **197**
Umberleigh, Edward {DCU 406} **197**
Unbearable Bassington, The (novel) 1, 58n.14, 114n.20,
 116n.42, n.43, 162n.5, 169, 223n.38, 225n.67, n.72
Unrest-Cure, The **147-48**, 209, 222n.29

Van Cheele see *Cheele, Van*
Vashtar, Sredni see *Sredni Vashtar*
Vera {OW 261; QT 326} 133, 139, **144-46**, **148-50**, 151, 160-61,
 166n.64, 220, 224n.57 see also *Durmot, Vera*
Vespaluus (Prince, later St.) {StV 166} **130**
Victor {Mor 492} 6, 55
Vladimir {Bag 77} **215**, 227n.88
Voler, Theodoric {Mou 94} 126, 163n.15, **176-78**, 206
Von Cernogratz see *Cernogratz, Von*

Waddacombe, John {Pon L.281} **94-97**
Waddacombe, Mona {Pon L.281} 66, **94-97**, 101, 108,
Walters, Mrs {O 514} 221n.17
Wappi (dog) {WC 412} 78, 93

Watched Pot, The (play) 101, 117n.49, 165n.46, 185, 222n.30,
 222-223n.36,n.38,n.40, 224n.49,n.59
Wattleskeat, Lucien {EW M.39} **184**, 228
 Way to the Dairy, The **179-80**, 222n.25
Wepley, Miss {RGL 227} 106
 Westminster Alice, The (sketches) 1, 98
 When William Came (novel) 1, 223n.38
Whimples, The {RC 24} 172
Wilfrid, Sir see *Blemley, Sir Wilfrid*
 Wolves of Cernogratz, The 66, **75-79**, 81, 93, 100, 103-04, 108,
 111-12, 113n.5, 117n.53, 118n.57, 163n.17, **187**
 Woman Who Never Should, The (sketch) 221n.15, 226n.82
Wratislav {W 152} **187**
 Wratislav **187**

 Yarkand Manner **196-97**
Yealmton, Bevil {HW L.287} **66-68**, 69, 71, 108, 114n.11
Yealmton, Thirza {HW L.288} **66-68**, 69-72, 80, 86, 98, 107-08,
 139
Yonelet, Mrs {E 359} **217**
Yonelet, Dora {E 359} **217-18**
Yorkfield, Tom {Bu 487} **216**
 Young Turkish Catastrophe, A **212-13**

Znaeym, Georg {I 447} **72-75**, 109-11, 154